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MY ROSES:

THE ROMANCE OF A JUNE DAY.

BY

Mrs. L. VIRGINIA (Smith) FRENCH.

"There are fatal days, indeed,
In which the fibrous years have taken root
So deeply, that they quiver to their tops
Whene'er you stir the dust of such a day."

Mrs. Browning.

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TO

"IDA RAYMOND,"

OF MOBILE, ALA.,

This Volume is Dedicated.

SHE WHO STANDS AMONG US LIKE—

A radiant Flora
Crowning all she loves with bays;
Bringing, like some fair Aurora,
Morning to our darkest ways.
Eyes of June — serene and tender,
Lighting up the wood and wold;
Soul of June — whose sunset splendor
Turns the clouds of Life to gold;
Brow of June — where Love reposes,
And its sunshine fadeth never;
Heart of June — whose summer roses
Bud, and blush, and bloom forever!

FOREST HOME, 1871.

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MY ROSES.

CHAPTER I.

THE MYSTERIOUS PICTURE.

What face is that?
What a face, what a look, what a likeness! Full on mine
The sudden blow of it came down, till all
My blood swam, my eyes dazzled.
It was as if a meditative man
Were dreaming out a summer afternoon,
And watching gnats afloat upon a pond,
When *something* floats up suddenly — out there —
Turns over: *a dead face, known once alive* —
So old, so new! It would be dreadful now
To lose the sight, and keep the doubt of this —
It plunges — ha! I've lost it —

E. B. Browning.

"HEAVENS, what a face!" This was the low-breathed exclamation which broke up from my heart like a sob, as my eye glanced over the collection; and then I said suddenly, without, for a moment, removing my fascinated gaze from the picture, "Sigismond!" In an instant he stood by my side — the single word *"Angélique!"* stole from his half-parted lips as I laid my forefinger on the little portrait — and then we both stood there together, gazing, as if spell-bound, upon its rare and radiant loveliness.

It was — let me remember — yes, I am quite sure it was on Tuesday morning — the morning of the first of June, 1852, that we stood there together, Sigismond Sauvollée

and I — in the daguerrean gallery of Monsieur Moisinett, corner of Camp and Canal streets, New Orleans — both gazing intently upon a little picture, which, framed with some twenty-five or thirty others, hung upon the front side of the apartment, between two tall uncurtained windows.

Perhaps the reason I remember the day so accurately is, because it was my birthday; on that first of June I completed my twentieth year, and it had been arranged between us (that is, Sigismond and myself) that we should be married on that day. But my father objected seriously — said he could not think of appointing that day for a bridal — and, to please him, we had postponed our marriage for one month. My *fiancé* had insisted upon having a little "sun-picture" of myself, small enough to fit into a diamond-circled locket which had once belonged to his mother; and when I suggested that a painting on ivory would be more suitable, he answered that he could not wait for such a one then — that since we could not be married until July, he would be obliged to leave home in a few days for a "run up the Coast" on urgent business, and he must have some tangible shadow of his betrothed to accompany him. He furthermore insisted that I should drive with him that very morning to Monsieur Moisinett's gallery, and give him at least a semblance of myself as a birthday gift, since he had so ardently hoped I would have given him the original on that day. It would, he said, help to soften his keen disappointment; and I — well, in brief, I went with him. I presume any lady similarly circumstanced would have done the same.

The operator desired me to sit several times, not succeeding to his own satisfaction; and when he carried the plates to an inner apartment for manipulation, I sat there chatting with Sigismond, who occupied the sofa, commenting upon different *poses* which I assumed; or, growing restless

and impatient with waiting, (as is my nature,) I paced to and fro, up and down the long apartment, pausing a moment before the tall mirror to toss up my short curls, or glancing at the innumerable pictures that hung about the walls. At last, as I was passing carelessly down the front side, *this picture*, from the centre of a score of others, struck up into my eyes; and, like a lightning flash, daguerreotyped itself upon my brain for evermore! It was as if, when one is passing thoughtlessly over a path of common pebbles, a weirdly brilliant opal flashes up into his dazzled eyes. As my glance caught this face, I started visibly; it went piercing, quivering, thrilling through me like a crystal dart — that wondrous, indefinable *something* about it — I knew not what — thrilled down into my very heart, broke there, and there remained! "Heavens what a face!" I breathed — then for a moment seemed to gasp for breath, and then found voice to say, as if struck with sudden pain — "Sigismond!" He sprang at once to my side; and as I pointed to the little portrait, his eye fell upon it: one word only escaped his lips, and we both stood there gazing — we scarce knew why — transfixed and fascinated. Neither spoke again, but my hand clasped his, half unconsciously. I felt as though I were losing my hold upon all the Present, vaguely wandering through some dim, bewildering chaos; and I could scarce keep down that strange prompting to call aloud — with the "shriek of desperate creatures calling on the dead," — to the unknown spirit which looked out at me from the shadow on that silver plate. It was but a little picture — some three inches by four, perhaps — but the face, *the face!* it burnt itself in upon my brain for an everlasting memory. The shadows of Time cannot dim it; the cycles of Eternity cannot fade. And ah! what a sweet, sweet face it was. The semblance of a young woman; lovelier far than any I had ever met outside of day-dreams. It was not sad; it was not joyous;

it was not splendid: only rich, and pure, and holy-like, in its entrancing beauty; with a soft yet penetrating sweetness, like the glance of a sinless angel when he beholds the sorrows of earth; an expression which was music, and which sank into your very soul, as though it were the far-away chiming of crystal bells. There was a memory in the face, too, which confused and bewildered, while it fascinated me — how, why, or what, I could not divine. It grew upon me every moment — that strange, indefinable, and intangible *something*, that seemed to mock me as familiar, and, when I strove to grasp it, faded away into the features of an utter stranger. I must have seen that face before — yet, no — that could not be; had I once met it living, face to face, I could never have forgotten it. And then, as I looked again, I said in my heart, "I *know* you, I have *seen* you;" but when, and where? Is this a remembrance of some former existence? a recollection of some other picture? a memory of some one I have loved and lost? a waif from the painted pageantry of dreams? Who, and what are you? Why should you strike down at once into *my* heart, and leave there forever your beautiful and bewildering shadow? Why should your subtle spirit sink thus into *my* soul; leaving it to bear eternally, like the dove, the burden of a melodious trouble? And thus I stood there, perhaps a few minutes, perhaps half an hour, (to me it seemed long years and ages,) taxing myself and it; eager, earnest, searching — and for what? Grasping after that mocking *something;* striving to gather it up from the chaos of my brain, as one ofttimes strives to gather and give voice to some long-forgotten, or only half-learned melody. It seemed an ignis-fatuus, that flamed at times upon the fair brow, or nestled in the clustering hair, or played about the exquisite lips; and when I, as it were, put forth my whole soul to grasp it, it fled back into nothing-

ness, or leaped off into those deep eyes that never struck off my gaze from their surface; but, utterly unfathomable, ever tempted me to look down, down into depth within depth of their darkness and mystery. How vainly I struggled to grasp this subtle *something* which so tantalized me —vainly

"As strives the blasted tree to clasp the fleeting wind."

And it was also vainly that I said to myself, Why this emotion? Why should my heart be shaken thus? Whence comes this foolish fancy? Fie, fie, Henriette de Hauterive, it has often been your pleasure to boast that when you were born, "nerves" were not *à la mode.* How's this? *unnerved* by a simple little picture? A very pretty girl it is true; but I trust *you* fear no rivals, mademoiselle! And I said to my heart, Stop now this foolish aching; this silly questioning; this idle curiosity. I *will* be myself — see how composed I can be!

"*M'amour,*" whispered my companion, suddenly, as he seized my hand, still raised to the picture, and his eye fell upon mine, that moment lifted to his, "I think I've found it. It reminds me of *yourself!*" Why, I cannot divine, but a shock like the touch of an electric wire thrilled through my whole frame, and the hot blood swept up into my face in a flood; then this passed, the blood retreated to my heart, I half shuddered, as though an icy wind had blown over me, and my eyes fell. "Found it," had he? then he too had been searching for that *something* — was it the same *something* that so eluded my eager grasp? No! he had not "found it;" there was certainly no sort of resemblance *to me* in that haunting picture. No, no! for I was tall and dark, and this was fair — ah! *so* fair.

"Once more, mademoiselle, if you please," said the artist, bowing, as he again adjusted his camera; "that is, if mademoiselle is not already *ennuyée.*"

"Not at all, monsieur," I said, absently, as I threw myself into the chair, and stared with far-searching, burning eyes into the camera, as though it had held some hidden secret crouching and cowering there.

"Ah! this will be very good, *tout de bon*," muttered the man, as he took out the plate once more, and bowed, as usual, to signify that I was released for the time being.

"Sigismond, *mon ami*," I said.

"Well, *ma chère?*" he inquired.

"I thought I saw Monsieur Moisinett enter that room just now, through the opposite door; pray go in, and inquire of him if this picture has an original, or if it is only a fancy piece. And if it has an original, ask who she may be—will you?"

"Certainly, if you desire it, *ma belle;* but I have no doubt he will think the inquiry an impertinent one."

"No, he will not, I'm certain; why should he? Why should he hang this picture here, in such a conspicuous position too, if he did not expect to answer to every one who sees it, who, and what, and where she is? No one with any appreciation of beauty can help asking such questions. It can't be one of our own city belles—I know them all 'by heart.' Can it be some lovely Louisianian from the 'Coast,' or one of those bewitching Kentuckians who visit the 'Crescent' during the winter? It is more the type of the Baltimore beauty—but oh! how surpassing all—"

"It may be some charming Habanese—who knows?" suggested he, smiling, and interrupting my half soliloquy.

"Hasten then with your inquiries, señor; make her out a compatriot, if you can;" and again I turned to study the picture, while Sigismond passed into the other apartment in search of information for me.

At the first sound of his returning footstep I started,

and, with a great throb at my heart, said, "Well?" And just then I became aware that a change had passed upon his countenance during the few moments of his absence. He had left me with a smile on his fine, frank face; now it wore an expression of mingled pain and disappointment. "It is *not* 'well!'" he said, in a low tone. "Ah! *mignonne*, how shall I tell you?"

"It is merely a fancy piece, then? How absurd in me to waste so much sentiment over some artist's ideal," I said, in real discomfiture.

"Alas, no — would it were!" he replied.

"'No?' and 'would it were?' What mean you, *mon ami?* I cannot understand you at all. This picture here is —"

"Is a woman's advertisement of her own beauty!" he said, sharply and scornfully.

"*What?* — what *can* you mean?" I asked the question slowly, never taking my eyes from his; for I confess I thought the man had lost his senses utterly.

"*Must* I tell you, Henriette?"

"'*Must* you tell me?'" I repeated, impatiently. "Speak! What is it you have to tell me? This trifling is unworthy both of you and me. Am I a child, to be thus —"

"No, not a child," he said, calmly; "but a *woman* — a high-minded, pure-hearted, noble woman. And because you are all this, I will tell you, though I know it will grieve you, my Henriette. That picture is *not* a fancy piece; its original lives in this city — a beautiful woman, but a fallen one — a woman *mal-famée.*"

"God of mercy! it *cannot* be!" I cried. Instantly the hot blood of mingled shame and indignation rushed like a torrent up to cheek and brow. I felt myself burning with shame, and confusion, and anger. I felt *almost* as though that insulting epithet had been hissed abroad of ME! I

know that my eyes shot forth their lightnings; for I felt at that moment as if personally defamed. I felt that, much as I loved him, I could have felled to the earth the man who dared utter to me that word of shame. Sigismond divined my thought; ah! how well he knew me, proud and passionate creature that I was! for he came nearer, and taking my hand gently, softly said, "*M'amour!* remember — we are talking now of a total *stranger*."

Of course — of course such words could never be coupled with *me*, or *mine*. They rose up in a long array before my "mind's eye" — that noble line of stainless dames — my mother's ancestry. All of them Honor's own — every one of them *sane* women. No one dare so much as breathe upon the stainless, shining steel of their fair fame, much less to cast thereon one drop of blood, or tears, to blot the bright escutcheon. Far above and beyond the sullying breath of the defamer stood the ladies of my honored line. True enough, this was a "total stranger." Why should my soul within me rise up resolutely to do battle for a woman who was nothing to me? whom I had never seen, never even heard of until that hour? A woman who was nothing to me; still, like myself, a woman. Younger than I, perhaps, and yet, already known as a "woman *malfamée*." Well, how many of them have worn it upon their hearts and brows for years and years — this brand of an unholy life; this "mark of the Beast in their foreheads"? How many of them wear the "scarlet letter," and writhe under it, and in mute anguish shrink away into the world's "dark places"! how many of them bear the fiery cipher-stain upon bold, unblushing foreheads, sitting regally upon transient thrones, and "glorying in their shame"? I looked up again at the picture. There was no brand upon that brow, polished and rounded like a child's: the deep eyes looked lovingly into mine, and the

sweet lips seemed curving into a soft smile of recognition. Involuntarily I was swept back into the former feeling of *nearness* to this woman; hot tears sprang into my eyes, and I exclaimed, impulsively: "Oh! Sigismond, *it is impossible!* There is some great mistake. Perhaps they have not understood which picture you mean; you may have designated the wrong one. Please go again, and say it is the centre portrait — the lovely creature with short, clustering curls, and unfathomable eyes. You did not say the one in the centre, Sigismond; I am *sure* they mistook your meaning. Won't you ask once more, to gratify me, and — and — not to wrong *her*, whoever she may be? For I am confident we do wrong her by these suspicions. I pray you, *mon cher ami*, do this for me?"

With a shadow on his face he left me — was gone longer than before — and the shadow had deepened when he came again. He passed me, walking straight up to the portraits, examined them attentively for some moments, then came and led me up to them also, gently and kindly.

"This *is* the right one, Henriette," he said, designating the central picture, and speaking in a low, sad tone, almost as if he might have felt a brother's sorrow for the lost.

"And then, do you see this, *ma chère?*" he continued, pointing to another oval which hung directly below *the* picture; "this is a second Circe: the two are friends, I am told, and constant companions. It is true — too true, Henriette."

My eyes fell upon the portrait he pointed out. It was that of a young woman; a dark, yet flashing beauty, full of an exultant and voluptuous vitality; with a half-smile of scorn upon the curved lips, and a defiant challenge to all the world in her large, bold, black eyes. She was dressed in the extreme of fashion, and the white velvet hat and cloak she wore did not strike you as at all *bizarre*, so

fittingly and well did they harmonize with her splendid beauty. This woman bore the brand. I saw in a moment the "mark of the Beast" — not on the fair forehead, or on the smoothly rounded cheek, but the signet of the "scarlet letter" had been pressed upon the full lips, and the fiery cipher-stain glowed within those large and lustrous eyes. Alas! for her. Alas! too, for me — for my faith in the angelic face that hung above her was shaken rudely; and as I tottered to the nearest chair, great waves of deathly pain swept over me, such as we feel when the very citadel of life is stormed by mortal anguish. Chaos was coming upon me again; I felt as though my soul was being dragged down, down, into some unknown abyss — some "lower deep," the utter darkness and horror of which no earthly language can express. Again, feeling that I was losing my hold upon consciousness, I put forth my hand blindly, seeking for Sigismond. It was caught, and I heard his voice, as if speaking to me through an immense distance: "*M'amour!* what is it? Good God! how pale she is! Speak to me, *mignonne.* Why are you so strangely shaken? Look at me, Henriette!" I struggled to obey him, to answer his call, and succeeded. I came up (as it seemed to me) out of a "horror of great darkness" — back to myself, and back to him. We had no time for words, however, for at that moment the operator entered, holding in his hand my last picture, already finished, and set in its diamond-circled frame. He gave it to Sigismond; for I, to conceal my changed countenance, had immediately risen and turned away to the mirror, busying myself in a great deal of unnecessary arrangement of my hat and mantle. They stood behind me, and I watched them, reflected in the broad mirror. A shade passed over the fine face of Sigismond, as he gazed upon the new "sun-picture,"

"Done by process indistinguishable,"

which he had so earnestly desired. A shade, I thought, which betokened disappointment.

"It is very good, monsieur, is it not? Fine shade; perfect position: it has the *intense* — what you call? Ah! 't is *très bien*, monsieur," remarked the artist.

I threw down my veil over a pallid face, and turned toward them. Sigismond dropped it by the chain into my hand. It was, indeed, an "intense" affair, as the young Frenchman had remarked. Highly wrought emotion crowned every lineament: it seemed to breathe and glow; and the great dark eyes pierced you through and through. It scarcely seemed *a woman's face* at all, with its "intense" expression, and short curling hair; and but for the uncovered throat and shoulder, with a bit of lace drapery which still remained above the setting, it might have passed for some proud, imperious boy of eighteen tropic summers, looking out from the present into a clouded future, and striving to read there the hidden secrets of his own destiny. And all this unsexing of myself came of my becoming excited over the picture of a "total stranger;" allowing incomprehensible impressions to run away with my sober senses, and, when I sat the last time, peering and poring into that common camera as though it held some dark and direful secret! The face did not wear the usual *womanly* expression of the woman he loved; therefore I was not surprised that Sigismond was somewhat dissatisfied with his new possession.

"This is not the 'every day' face of '*L'ame de joie*,'" he said, in a low voice, as he looked at it over my shoulder. "But I will keep it, nevertheless, since there is no time to take another. You are not well to-day, and I have wearied you already. Shall we go?"

"Presently," I replied.

"Thank you — *pardonnez, je vous prie* — I will supply

the change in a moment," said the operator, as M. Sauvollée handed him a gold coin, and he left the room. Instantly I turned, and, springing forward to the mysterious portrait, held up my own in its frame of brilliants, close beside it.

"There is no resemblance between them — not the faintest shadow of a likeness. My Henriette, forgive me that I said this strange picture reminded me of *you*. It was simply some passing shade; it exists not now. See how very different they are — quite as different as the originals!" exclaimed Sigismond, hurriedly, as he came forward and attempted to draw away my hand. "Do not thus compare yourself with one who — indeed you must not do it; it pains me, Henriette;" and, just then, as with a gentle but determined force, he attempted to take it from my hand, and it turned into a new light, I thought I caught the shadow of that indefinable *something* in *both* pictures, though so unlike; and, dropping it from a nerveless hand, ere Sigismond could recover it, it had fallen to the floor.

"Let us go," I said, as my companion stooped to regain it; and then, as he stepped back at the voice of the artist, who had now returned, I paused a moment to take one farewell look at the pure, angelic face before me, and the splendor of its evil genius below. Both so beautiful, yet so wholly unlike — one a seraph with the lingering light of Paradise still upon her brow, and the other bearing, even amid its beauty,

> "A brand which all the pomp and pride
> Of a fallen spirit cannot hide."

And, Heaven be praised! as I looked upon these pictures and noted the contrast, my woman's faith in woman came back to me. It was impossible for me to look upon the

face of that first woman and believe it the semblance of a fallen angel. I simply *would not* believe it; for if ever *Deus fecit* was written upon human brow, it was unmistakably stamped upon this pure tablet before me. And my heart cried out, in its strong emotion: "*Guilty?* fallen? Great God of all innocence and truth, it cannot — *must not* — SHALL NOT be!"

CHAPTER II.

DAYS OF JUNE.

The buoyant air
Doth quiver with the melodies it holds
As thrills the bosom of the morning cloud;
The lark is floating in; and then above
And over all a sky like heaven's own smile,
In its unsullied brightness!
. . . . . .
Thou art beside me, with thy tresses like
The golden flash of waters; with thy cheek
Of pearly roses; and thine eye where heaven
Burns in its own blue lustre.
. . . . . Life with us
Is in its blushing morning. L. V. F.

JUNE, my birth-month, has ever been my special beatitude — to me "the month of all months in the year." Crowned with a full maturity, yet having lost none of the freshness of youth, it is the very perfection of beauty. A moonlit midnight in the "leafy month of June" — surely earth has no other hour which shall dare assume to be its peer. Some one has beautifully said, "About all perfect things there lingers a voluptuous atmosphere." Therefore, from the full, sensuous beauty which breathes and glows everywhere around us at this season, do we argue that JUNE is the perfection and poetry of the year. It has all the blooming richness of July, without those fervid heats and brazen skies; and it possesses all the dewy freshness of "merrie, merrie May," without any coquettish pouting under a mist, or veiling of smiles with a chilly rain-cloud.

Its sunshine is the "golden mean" which vivifies; its breezes are the "soft breathings of the south," which refresh and vitalize; its cloud-shadows glide along the sky like air-ships with burnished keel and snowy sail; and even its passing showers are the very *ne plus ultra* of their species, laden with earth's fertility and crowned with "heaven's aërial bow."

Ay, my birth-month had always been to me a beatitude. WILLIS, in his poetical way, has somewhere said, that "the wheel of the year, in its annual revolution, dips once into the atmosphere of Paradise, and that bright baptism takes place in June." I quite loved the "poet of society" for saying so. I quite honored him, in that his intercourse with the world had not obliterated his love of Nature, though I half suspect that his appreciation of June days, combining the regal beauty of summer with the joyousness of spring, bore a strong likeness to his appreciation of some lovely "Lady Jane"—some lovable woman bearing into her beautiful maturity the gladness and guilelessness of her girlhood. That is "a way" men have, is it not? especially when they are also poets. I do not assert that it *is* so, remember; I simply ask the question. You can think about it, if you like, or can spare the time; it is not a matter which in the least concerns *me*.

We women who are not poets, possibly appreciate our June days differently. The bare fact of existence is a joy to us; an overflowing chrism of happiness is ours, merely because we live. The present is to us a benison. We do not now, as in the early springtime, listen for the first note of the bluebird and the murmur of the bee, or peep slyly along the borders to find the crocus and the early violet, or hearken at nightfall to the dripping of the rain, and the more sullen and rapid flow of the river; nor do we, as in the glorious "Indian Summer," desire to sit down close

beside the one we love best on earth, away on some beetling cliff of the "sky-kissing mountain," and, gazing afar over hill and valley, dimmed and yet illuminated by the mellow, golden haze of autumn, dream such day-dreams of love and "witching melancholy" as leave no other Paradise to which we would aspire. In spring our pleasure is that of anticipation — it is in the FUTURE; in autumn our deep joy is in remembrance — it comes up from the PAST; but now, in this perfect season — the June of the year and the June of our lives — we cease to hope, to remember, or to regret, and our souls revel only in the halcyon and glorious PRESENT. And now (if ever) we are tempted to wander forth into the grand old woods, and to endeavor to place ourselves in immediate connection with the Spirit of Beauty and Wisdom which pervades the universe. Under the magnolias we will sit hour after hour, wrapt in the luxurious *dolce far niente* of the present, unmindful that there is to be a future — forgetful that there has been a past. The wind comes down, murmuring musically through the thick and glossy foliage, the grass-blades glint in the sunshine, and the pallid wild-flower shoots up its slender stem through last year's already mouldering leaves. Up, up, and afar in the deep-blue zenith hovers a hawk, as steady on his broad pinions as if sleeping in mid-air; a squirrel chatters in the live-oak over yonder, and all along the borders of the wood the air is vocal with the carols of the mocking-bird and thrush, and illuminated here and there by the flame-like plumage of the redbird and the oriole.

How all these things seem to *live*, and throb, and glow, before us; they have a being in common with us, an enjoyment of existence like us; and while we live and love them, they seem to tell us that they live and love us in return. The tall trees nod their graceful "good morrow," and stretch forth their huge, waving arms to welcome us;

the bright moss-clump at the foot of yonder decaying trunk gives back our smile of recognition; the rough old oak-root, gnarled, and gray, and weather-beaten as it is, invites us to rest; and the wild-blossom at our feet, swaying to and fro as the breeze bows its delicate head, seems to implore us to spare its fragile life and unprotected loveliness. We feel, while thus wandering through the green labyrinths of the forest, that at every step a living Intelligence accompanies us — that we breathe and move amid the radiant realities of a spirit-world.

It is good for me to be alone with the (so called) "inanimate" children of Nature, at such a season as this; and if you would confess it, you would acknowledge it good for you also. If we have sorrows — and what child of earth has not? — we can give them voice in the midst of those sympathizing and unchiding friends; and, should this world be bright to us, and love, and health, and joy be ours, then may we bow our souls amid the shadows of the dim old woods, and, before those living witnesses, pour forth the full heart's gratitude to Him who has "cast our lines in pleasant places," and given to us the "goodly heritage" of *happiness*. We can go forth into the "peopled solitude" of a June midnight — the hour of passion and of mystery, of power and of prayer; when the night-winds sigh around us, and the blue eye of heaven reflects itself within the soul's secret fountains; and we feel that we are *alone with God*. When the silvery stars grow pale with watching — when the night itself seems sinking wearily under the contemplation of its own mysteries, and its stillness becomes so profound as to be almost insupportable, we too begin to realize something of the might and mystery of our own being. Looking upward, we behold the realms of space, that spread and deepen as we gaze away, far away into illimitable distance, fit emblem of the eternity it symbolizes. We

may essay to measure it by towering hilltops, the wandering night-cloud, and the faint, dim-twinkling star; and in like manner we may strive to "fathom life," by experience or theory; but soon arises the impassable barrier to all our inquiries; soon we are lost in depths where the plummet-line of thought *must* fail us — where the strongest, sternest, and most far-reaching human intellect must kneel, and tremble in the presence of the INCOMPREHENSIBLE.

Do I wander? If you think so, pardon me. I have been going back to those June days of ours — that is to say, Sigismond and I. Something of their bloom and beauty, remembrances also of their tears and blood, recollections of their struggles and their triumphs, came over me. Would it not be better, however, to lay these aside for the present, and to tell you, just here, who and what were Henriette de Hauterive and Sigismond Sauvollée? I think so. Doubtless you agree with me.

With your permission, then, Sigismond and I were "affianced lovers;" and, (what is something still more to the purpose,) "fast *friends*." The former — that is to say, M. Sauvollée — of French extraction, was, by birth, a Cuban. His paternal home lay amid the luxuriant beauties of the "Queen of the Antilles." There lay also his landed estates, and there his family and friends waited, one day, to welcome us both. Upon the death of my mother, (which took place on the first of June, and my second birthday,) Sigismond Sauvollée, a bright boy of seven summers, was brought to our home to be my companion and playmate. A remote family connection existed between my mother and his; they had always been warmly attached friends; and I had been, in a laughing way, set apart as the future bride of Sigismond, ere the light of six short months had passed upon my baby brow. My memories of my mother are only the vaguest dreams — my father rarely mentioned

her name; but from my old nurse, an unusually reticent woman, I gained the knowledge that a tacit agreement existed between Madame de Hauterive and Madame Sauvollée, to the effect that in the coming years their children and their children's possessions were to be united. And so it came to pass, pleasantly enough, that the young Cuban was brought to Louisiana to be educated with me. We grew up together — associated every day as intimately as brother and sister. We were educated together, too, having the same masters, with the exception of two years, which he spent at the University of Virginia, and I at the Patapsco Institute, near Baltimore. That I was often self-willed, proud, and passionate, as a child, and that I am somewhat so still, I would not pretend to deny; and that Sigismond, being five years my senior, with a nature singularly calm, profound, and self-controlled, (for a Frenchman, and one born under the tropics,) had always exercised over me a deep and abiding influence, is also true. I loved him tenderly, and, when I knew myself to be in the *wrong*, I gave up to him, compromising with my *amour propre*, however, by stoutly declining to give up to any one else! Still, individuality was strong within me, and it was impossible that I ever could be *absorbed* into any other being, let me love him ever so devotedly; and this may have been the reason that when I knew myself to be in the *right*, I gave up to nobody. True, Sigismond and myself frequently held different opinions, and occasionally fell into animated discussions as to what *was* right or wrong. When we returned from school at the same time, it was not as strangers — a "young lady" and "gentleman." Two years had made but unimportant changes in us, or differences in our feelings; and, again united under my father's roof, again wandering through our old childish haunts, or going abroad "into society," we seemed pleas-

antly to fall back into the old ways, and confidences, and loves that characterized our happy childhood. With the exception of a few brief visits to his Cuban home, and occasional tours through the country on business for my father, Sigismond was always with me. I had many acquaintances, perhaps a few friends, among the bright belles of my native State; but I never had a *confidante.* I never needed one; for Sigismond was much more to me. If I was joyous, that joy was not complete until shared with him; if I had sorrows, light and fleeting though they were as shadows of the summer clouds, I wept them away upon his bosom. He called me, in those June days, by the old child-names of "*M'amour,*" and "*Fleur de lis,*" and "*L'ame de joie;*" and if we had substituted some others for "*petit mari,*" and "little wife," it was not that we loved less; nay, only the more. I am aware that those who are learned in the "world's ways" may say that this picture of our content and happiness is not "according to custom," considering that we were both young and wealthy, somewhat inclined to gay life, each having a full share of outside admiration and adulation: nevertheless it is true. I am fully aware that, being destined for each other, we *ought* to have lived at daggers' points, as is the prevailing style among Beatrices and Benedicks of modern romance; but I am constrained, by honest truth, to confess that we did no such thing. This was "*un*-natural," of course, and our conduct, under the circumstances, is reprehensible to the last degree. I apologize for our shortcomings, and cry the mercy of modern romance and its critics!

To us, (neither hero or heroine of modern literature, but simply a young man and woman of some sixteen years ago,) those days of June in which we lived and loved were neither unpleasant nor "unnatural." I had many admirers — quite a crowd of suitors, too — for was I not an

heiress? perhaps even a few lovers; but, somehow I never chose to regard them as such. It was not in my nature to descend to the little intrigues of coquetry and flirtation; that was something I never thought of any more than I should have dreamed of superseding some slender spider in weaving his nets for the summer butterflies. (This also may be considered "unnatural" — perhaps — oh! saddest of sins! — "unfeminine"! If so, allow me to deplore it with you, and to bewail the fact that it is now too late for repentance!) Confessing thus my utter incapacity for coquetry, let me go on to state that as to entertaining any *real* sentiment toward any other than the man who had been so long my friend, instructor, brother, and counsellor, I was saved the trouble of ever once thinking seriously about that. I have compared many men with Monsieur Sauvollée; but he never gave me an opportunity for making the comparison to his disadvantage. His high-toned and correct *every-day life* — his fine, manly beauty — his dignity of character — his warm, generous nature — his quiet and unassuming superiority over all other men of my acquaintance — above all, his uncompromising honor and *reliability*, and the deep, pure love which he so long had poured from his heart for my acceptance — these exempted me from all temptation to prove inconstant to my childhood's vows. I do not in the least speak of my faithfulness to him as a merit — truly no; he left me no choice; he never allowed my love to be tempted to stray, simply because he was careful to combine all love's attractions within himself. Often I have wondered that this is not more generally adopted as the bond of Love — it is so exalting and so effectual. I have wondered to see men, and women too, put their trust in Law and Custom; and sometimes even allow Fear to hang his chains of ice on Love, when it would be better to teach him how to forge his own bright, easy

fetters of elastic gold! Sigismond's example was beautiful to me, and I used my best endeavors to emulate it. That he had never given a thought of his heart's love to other than myself, I was perfectly assured. I believed it — not because I felt myself to be more worthy than all others; no — but simply because his actions said so, and in *nothing* had he ever given me reason to doubt him. Doubtless there were women more amiable, more "lovable" than I — doubtless there were many more beautiful. I was what men call "magnificent," it is true; and I was well endowed intellectually. I say this without vanity, of course — merely as I would speak of a third person; for I neither created nor endowed myself, and if God bestowed upon me beauty, either personal or mental, it was mine for His glory and others' good — not for the petty vanities of self.

In common with my birth-month, I had a full, fresh, and as yet untaxed vitality — an affluence of exultant energy and power, which was, perhaps, not woman-*like* in these days of pseudo-refinement; and yet, I trust I am most *womanly*. In person, I was tall and rather slender, yet full-limbed, lithe, and strong; I danced *à ravir*, rode admirably, and with my gold-enamelled "revolver" could hit a target in the "eye" at ten paces. Such "accomplishments," as well as the fine, healthful development of my *physique*, are, of course, due to Sigismond; I had shared his boy's sports from infancy; I loved the free, fresh air, the ride, the river, the open field or tangled wood; and no restraint had ever been placed upon my *boyishness* by my father. Indeed, for that matter, my father had appeared to take but little interest in me during my childhood, and there being no "quick bond of sympathy" between us was, I suppose, one reason why it always seemed so natural to me to turn for all congeniality and confidence to

Sigismond. My father was a reserved, self-contained, undemonstrative man, and I had imputed his inattention to myself to that cause, rather than to a want of natural affection. I never knew exactly whether he considered me a creature whom

> "Heaven never meant to be a passive thing,
> That can be struck, and hammered out to suit
> Another's taste or fancy,"

and so was content to let me grow up without restraint, or any other species of paternal "hammering;" or whether the free life he allowed me to lead had made me the strong-willed, impulsive woman which, at the age of twenty years, I found myself.

My father must have been, at one time, a remarkably stately and handsome man, but for years he had been an invalid; and my remembrance could not reach backward to a time when he had appeared young or vigorous. Even at the time of which I write, he was scarcely past his prime; yet had he a broken constitution, and the look of a man prematurely aged. The *first of June*, as far back as I could remember, had been a gloomy anniversary to him. That it was my birthday he never forgot — yet it was also the anniversary of my mother's death; and my white-haired nurse, usually so reticent, was wont to shake her head and say, "Ah! bless God, my lady, that you was a mere baby then — a mere baby. Old master, poor man, nebber bin the same since that dark day come ober this house. That was the stroke wat cut deep, an' leave the scar on the heart for years an' years. It 'll war' him out long afore his time."

Nearly a year previous to the period when my story commences, I had had a very severe attack of fever, consequent, perhaps, upon a change of climate, as I had just

returned from school. During that protracted illness my father devoted himself to me, and after my recovery I found his manner toward me very materially changed.

He was kind, gentle, even at times affectionate; indulgent he had ever been. After that fever, my long, luxuriant hair had all fallen, and now the young growth, glossy and silken and raven black, with a wave and curl in it, was just of sufficient length to droop over my brow and neck — which very much heightened my general resemblance to my father. I believe he always considered me as like himself — not at all resembling my fair, dead mother. Whether or not this was a gratification to him, I never knew; but I do know that he was highly pleased, one day in the early May of this year, when we had company to dine, and a gentleman, who had long known my father, exclaimed, looking earnestly at me:

"Upon my life, De Hauterive, mademoiselle your daughter, is the revised counterpart of yourself, some twenty-five or thirty years ago."

"She is the only one left who bears my name. Mademoiselle — your health," said my father, raising his glass, and looking at me with a gratified smile.

"*Oui* — long life and happiness. Mademoiselle, *votre serviteur*," added his friend, bowing and tossing off his wine.

"'Long life and happiness' — not the former without the latter," said my father slowly, his eyes fixed upon my face with far more of love and pride in their expression than I had ever detected there before.

Since my return from school I had presided as mistress of the establishment. Mrs. McIlvaine, the former housekeeper, carried the keys as usual, but I dispensed the hospitalities of my father's house to his guests, attending also to many of his little peculiarities; and he never once in

his life appeared dissatisfied with anything I did for him. I had endeavored, even as a child, (as far as I knew how,) to win upon the affections of this only parent; and I believe that he, (when he began to notice me at all,) in truth, gave me his respect, his admiration, even his affection to a *degree* — in brief, everything save that which would have been most beneficial to both — his sympathy and confidence. At rare intervals, since my return, he spoke to me of my mother — scarcely in any other way, however, than to say how closely I resembled her in character, (not personal appearance,) and how proud she would have been, had she lived, to see me blooming into womanhood.

This, in brief, was the position of family affairs in our household, on the morning of that first of June, 1852, when Monsieur Sauvollée and I visited the rooms of M. Moisinett, (corner of Camp and Canal streets;) and found there a tiny picture, the discovery of which gave a deeper coloring to our after-lives. I will hasten to resume my story. Its movement is both strong and swift, for the days of this June had not passed ere all the most exciting action was complete. Purest pleasure and poignant pain — rich reward and righteous retribution — the toil and the triumph — doubt, and despair, and death: how they drive across each other's lines before me, as Memory calls up anew the mingled maze of that shifting panorama which marked for us those darkening days of June!

CHAPTER III.

ON THE "SHELL ROAD."

Fair as the first that fell of womankind.

BYRON.

Give me a living reason she 's disloyal.

. . . . . .

If *she* be false, O ! then Heaven mocks itself.
I 'll not believe it !

SHAKSPEARE.

ON this first of June of which I have been speaking (which was to have been my wedding-day,) I did not once see my father. His disapproval of our marriage upon that day caused us to postpone it for a month — this being his urgent request.

On that morning he breakfasted in his own room, where he continued all day, until rather late in the evening — nearly sunset, indeed; when he ordered his horse, and rode out in the direction of the lake. Returning about dusk, he retired immediately to his chamber; and when I sent up his tea, with the inquiry, "Was he well, and might I come up to say good-night?" the reply brought back by his man, Thomas, was, "Quite well, but did not wish to be disturbed — he sent me good-night, and would see me in the morning."

It was, perhaps, nine o'clock next morning, when I tapped softly at his chamber-door, and listening, heard his voice as softly bid me enter. He was seated in his easy-chair, still in dressing-gown and slippers: he rose as I en-

tered, and coming forward, held out his hand to bid me "*bon jour.*" He seemed feeble, I thought — and his countenance, though kindly, was wan and haggard. The eyes looked so heavy, the high brow so worn, and the whole man so dejected and weary! The day previous must have been to him a day of torture. I do not know what came over me just then, but I saw that he was suffering, and, while tears sprang to my eyes, I put up my arm around his neck, and as he bowed his head, I kissed him — a thing I had never dared do in all my life before. He was visibly affected — his hand trembled violently as he placed a low seat for me beside his own chair. For some moments both were silent. Then, after failing once or twice in my attempts to carry on a connected conversation, I noticed that his morning papers were unopened, and not placed where he liked to have them. I rose, opened and laid them upon his table, adjusted several articles about the room, arranged the curtains so as to admit only a soft and pleasant light, and shook up the pillows of his lounge. Then, as I sat down by him again, I took up one of the papers and said, "May I read to you, sir?"

"Do, if you please, my child," he replied, very gently. Scarcely could I see the words for the great tears that would come welling up to my eyes; scarcely could I steady my voice to speak them, for the thrill and tremble in my heart at those new, sweet words — "My child." It was the first — the very first time he had ever uttered them to me — and I a woman grown! Twenty years — and this the only time I ever remembered to have been called "My child." Gathering back my voice as soon as I could command it, I read on, pausing at intervals to listen to his comments, and thus the hours wore away. Dinner was announced ere I left my father that day, and as I turned to go, he said, as he drew me toward him, "I thank you; you have done me much good: when will you come again?"

"At any time you may desire it, sir," I replied.

"I feel that I shall desire it always, when you are disengaged. Let it be soon, my child." And with a full heart and brimming eyes I descended the stairs.

"You look pale, *ma belle* — pale and weary, too — you have not been abroad once to-day," said Sigismond, as we trifled over the dessert. "Let me order out the 'Camanche Chief' for you, and we 'll have a canter halfway down to the lake — say as far as the Métairie, at all events. What do you say, *fleur-de-lis?*"

"That I shall be happy to go, if you will drive me yourself. I don't want Pierre to drive us, and I am not equal to the 'Camanche' this evening."

"Very well, it shall be as you desire. It is so unheard-of a circumstance for *you* to look wearied, Henriette! You are thinking too much about that picture. I begin to wish you had never seen it."

"I am glad to have discovered it, *mon ami.* I have a presentiment that merely seeing it, is not to be the end. We will talk of it hereafter — on the road," I said, pausing suddenly, as my maid appeared in answer to Sigismond's ring.

"*Très bon.* Here, Ninette, bring your mistress her hat and some wrapping. Take a mantle, *mignonne* — the dews may be falling before our return," said Monsieur Sauvollée, as he passed out.

"Throw back the top, Pierre; you know we 're not going to be shut up, or down either, upon such an evening as this — pretending to be out for the benefit of the air, too," laughed he, as the horses dashed up to the gateway, and we took our seats in the light vehicle.

"Now for it — take it easy, my beauties," he added, as the spirited favorites bounded off; "and show off your mettle to the mistress. Is n't he a 'model,' *mignonne?* If it

was n't for the climate, I could fancy myself a Lapp, and should begin to sing of him as 'Kulnasatz, my reindeer;'" and Sigismond, with a gay smile, brought the tip of his whip gently, almost *lovingly* down upon the satiny coat of his especial delectation in the way of horseflesh — the "Camanche." "What would men be fit for without — horses?" he emphasized, with a quick glance into my eyes. I was spiritless, and he was exerting himself to rouse me.

"Not very much, I confess. So much greater is my admiration for horses than for men, that if a good-looking Centaur were to appear as my suitor, there would be small chance for *you*, señor," I answered, laughingly.

"*Tout de bon!* I thought I should wake you! You are thinking again, and when you keep all your thoughts to yourself, you know I can't bear it," he said.

We were out of the city, and bowling along the most delightful (to me) of all the world's "drives," the "New Shell Road." The moment the horses' hoofs struck the firm, smooth surface, they seemed endowed with all the full freshness and elastic vigor of this summer-spring; tossing their proud heads, they pranced over the beautiful stretch of "white way" before them, as though they might have been Aurora's steeds, and this "the luminous track of day" they were wont to travel. The canal reflected white clouds that hung high up in the mid-heaven; birds here and there were dropping down into the thick foliage in an atmosphere of song; the tall old cypresses waved their banners of emerald creeper, and gray, swaying moss; the lake breeze set the young leaves all a-tremble; and now and then a lonely dove, deeper in the forest, sent forth upon the fragrant air the soft, sighing cadence of her mourning, "so musical, so melancholy." Occasional equipages and equestrians appeared upon the road, nearly every one going in the direction of the lake, for this was the fashionable

evening drive — a sort of Alameda for the gay denizens of the Crescent City.

At first I had leaned back languidly upon the cushions; but very soon the pure, free air, the exercise, and the beautifully smiling face of Nature around us, together with Sigismond's infectious *bonhomie,* aroused me from my lethargy; and, shaking off the spiritless calm which had crept over me, I began to recount to my companion the particulars of this day, spent almost entirely with my father. My new experiences interested him deeply. It was a source of sincere gratification to him that the barriers so long existing between my father's heart and that of his only child seemed slowly crumbling down — opening up the way, he fondly hoped, for a new era in both our lives.

"*Cela procède bien,*" he remarked, as I finished my recital. "Ah! it is more than well. You will yet be able to bring to him great happiness — possibly when he needs it most: I pray it may be so. Was I not right in naming you long ago, '*L'ame de joie?*'" and his eyes rested upon my face, full of that calm and tender light which I so loved to see.

"Perhaps you may have some pleasant news to give me in exchange for mine," I said. "Of course, you remember your promise of last night?"

"*Oui!* But first I will 'revise and correct' a late remark of mine. I asked, what are men fit for without — horses? Now I inquire, of what worth are men without — women? I really felt completely lost and good-for-nothing to-day without you — *un homme ennuyeux.* I became that miracle of modern life, a man weary of — himself. Consequently I turned to the business of investigation for your special benefit. When I found that you were not coming downstairs *at all* this morning, I took out the 'Chief' here, for a drive up town. My intention was to go first to the Ve-

randa, and consult with Eugene or La Moyne; but every thing came round in the easiest and most natural way imaginable, quite contrary to my anticipations. Passing the St. Louis Hotel, I saw Alphonse Cartiere, of Baton Rouge, standing at the entrance. He hailed me, and came out to admire the 'Camanche,' of course; after that, I invited him to take a seat with me, which he did. We drove up Royal at a spanking pace — that is to say, as gracefully as those detestable boulders will allow — and drew up at the Veranda. Eugene was not in — absent 'professionally.' His popularity in the business

> . . . 'to mend or end us,
> *Secundum artem*,'

is becoming ruinous to friendship and leisure: he rarely ever has time to catch his breath, it seems to me. But he is building up for himself a reputation and a fortune."

"Which, when he wins them, will give him all the friendship and leisure he can reasonably desire," I interpolated, smiling.

"*Vraiment.* But we will not be satirical just now: when you come to think about it, this is a very tolerable old world after all — in any event, the best we are acquainted with, as yet," he replied, laughing.

"*Comme cela:* proceed, señor." And he continued,

"We were turning off, when just opposite us, coming round the St. Charles, whom should we meet but the living originals of those two pictures we saw at Moisinett's yesterday! 'Ah!' I exclaimed, with as much *nonchalance* as I could summon up at the moment, 'what a very lovely woman — there — just turning the corner now! Don't you see, Cartiere? Who can she be?'

"'Which one are you talking about?' inquired he, with a half smile.

"'The one in — in — well, I don't know what you call the color; *not* the one in rose-color — the other,' I replied.

"'Aha!' he laughed; 'and so you prefer the ashes of roses to the roses themselves? Well, there are exceptions to all rules, and in this case I can't say but I commend your taste. Delicious creature, is n't she? Like Katinka,

> . . . . . "A Georgian, white and red;
> With great blue eyes, a lovely hand and arm,
> And feet so small they scarce seem made to tread
> The earth,"

and so forth.'

"'A truce to description; I've seen her. Tell me *who* she is!' I interrupted.

"'Very well,

> "I won't describe; description *is my forte*,
> But every fool describes in these bright days," etc.

and, besides, when I come to think of it,

> "Her beauty is of that o'erpowering kind
> Whose force description only would abate;
> . . . it would strike you blind
> Could I do justice to the full detail;
> So, luckily for both, my phrases fail!"'

"'Will you soon have done with that nonsense, and give a man a plain answer?' I asked, much amused with his *badinage*.

"'Where is the sense of telling a man what he and everybody else knows?' he inquired, facing me. 'By-the-by, Sauvollée, how admirably you put on the "anxious inquirer" as you wondered who this Lady Gay *could* be! Any fellow but myself, now, might have been humbugged into the belief that you did n't know her.'

"'And most assuredly I do not,' I answered. 'I never saw the lady before in my life.'

"'Pshaw! don't talk in that style to *me*. You 've met her at least a score of times, I 'll wager; on the streets — down at the Métairie at the last meeting — or at the Opera House. She is "all the rage" just now.'

"'You quite mistake,' I responded. 'I was in Havana when the spring races came off — and since my return —'

"'Well — yes. It may be so — on the whole,' he said, laughing heartily. 'I thought you were practising upon me — *frauduleusement* — you understand. You 've been absent sometimes, and — by the zone of Venus! it's rather a tight rein that magnificent Junonian De Hauterive keeps upon you.'

"'I prefer that you should not mention that name in any such manner or connection,' I said, dropping out the word 'connection,' unconsciously, as I turned and looked him steadily in the eyes.

"'Frankly, then, I beg your pardon, Sauvollée. I intended no disrespect either to you or your *fiancée*,' he apologized. 'But — here we are, away up town — if you will turn about, now, bringing up round the corner of the St. Charles, and strike off in the direction of the Catholic Cemetery, I will point out to you the "*Maison des Bijoux*," or "House of the Jewels," as those fast fellows in our set have styled the residence of this gem of beauty.'

"'Would not Maison des *Pseudamantes* be a more appropriate name?' I asked, as I wheeled the 'Chief,' and struck out again for the St. Charles.

"'Ay! ay! "mock-diamonds," every one of them! But, hang moralizing — where 's the use?' and he laughed in his half-reckless way. 'If *I* had been a committee appointed to christen that expensive Mohammed's paradise, I 'd have styled it the Maison de *Phlébotomie;* for, by the god

of war, the atmosphere bleeds one like the very d— well, the doctors, of course. There! don't drive right over that specimen of young America: how absent-minded you are! Explain this abstraction. What is the matter, Sauvollée?'

"'Nothing — nothing at all — go on with your story,' I said, somewhat impatiently.

"'Story? Now listen to the man! I have n't any story to tell. All I know concerning those fair dames is simply this: the name of the brunette is Marguerite; if she possesses a surname, it has never transpired in my presence. They call the other — your "ashes of roses" I mean — Coralie — Coralie Lesueur, I think; she is the niece and especial "gem" of Madame Lesueur, the amiable hostess of the "Hotel des Bijoux." *La belle* Marguerite is *not* an angel; her constant companion, Mademoiselle Coralie, *looks* like one; that is,

> "As far as outward show may correspond:
> I'll not be bail for anything beyond."

I have been an occasional visitor there with that fastest of "fast" young gentlemen, Jules Berthêl. He is one of the *habitués* of the place. By-the-by, where does he raise his purses? He scatters money like a sultan. Mademoiselle Marguerite is a great favorite with him — the imperial Gulbeyaz! She fascinates, even while she tramples you down.

> "There is a self-will even in her feet;
> They tread, as upon necks —"

and so on. And that's all I know about these pretty "pseudamantes," as you style them. In my visits I never saw Coralie Lesueur — understand that she puts on quite an extensive assortment of "airs," and never enters the public *salon*.'

"'There is some hope in that,' I said.

"'Hope? for what? What sort of hope, pray? I don't exactly understand you. Do you know you are looking as grave as all the city Sunday-schools on their good behavior at a holiday fête, and as gray and lofty as the spire of the old Cathedral? There! turn the corner here: yonder looms the "*Maison des Bijoux.*" Very tolerable domicile, as far as appearance goes, after all.'

"We soon passed the house; all was silent about it; in nothing distinguishable from any other handsome city residence. Turning several squares, I set Alphonse down at his hotel, the St. Lou — "

"*Hush! look! who is that?*" I uttered, grasping his arm suddenly. My heart rose in my throat; my brain whirled; a deadly faintness seized me; yet, with half-dazed eyes, I strained my gaze, through my thick lace veil, upon the group just in front of us. I took it all in in a moment. We were driving leisurely back to town, when, amid the gay crowd passing and repassing, (for at this hour the number of pleasure-seekers was greatly increased,) my eye fell upon this fair equestrienne, with two attendant cavaliers.

"It is *she!*" whispered Sigismond. There was no need to tell me; too well I knew that face — that face so subtly, strangely sweet — that heart-haunting face! Her appearance was such as would arrest the most careless observer; she was indeed "the cynosure of neighboring eyes." Independent of the exceeding loveliness of the face, and the rare grace and beauty of figure, her presence and costume would command attention. She reminded me of some fair vision of the knightly tales of old. I thought of Thomas the Rhymer dazzled by his day-dream of the Elfland Queen as she came in state,

"Riding down by the Eildon Tree."

Her horse was a spirited creature, raven black, and glossy as satin, and she sat upon him like an empress. Her habit of black velvet, and hat of the same, the sweeping plumes tipped with snow, set off the transparent complexion and rose-leaf cheek to a charm; her white gauntlets grasped lightly the sable and silken rein; there was a half smile upon the lips as she went floating past us, but her eyes were cast down, hidden: and why? What a picture it was, though — I see it now! The lovely lady and her sable steed; her two attendants, superbly mounted also, and costumed in the extreme of fashion; a splendid tableaux: to one who could not read it aright, how full of gayety and grace! to me, who looked into the fatal meaning, how redolent of grief and gloom!

"Who was that man on her left?" I asked of Sigismond, rousing myself from the abstraction into which I had fallen, as we drove into the city.

"I have never heard his name," he replied. "I have seen him, however, about the hotels, and think he is from Mississippi: I heard some one designate him the other day as 'that fellow who *presented* Jules Berthêl with ten thousand; I suppose at some *maison de jeu*, of course. He plays like a returned Californian, *on dit:* a professional *joueur*, no doubt. You know the other caballero — Jules Berthêl."

"Yes — I should think so." And I had reason to remember Berthêl. He came of an ancient and opulent French family, residing in the interior of the State; and he was one of those who, backed by his family, had sedulously presented his claims to my hand (and fortune). Not abashed by a simple and decided No, he seemed determined to persecute me with his attentions; and, persecution of any kind being a thing to which I was entirely unaccustomed, I let him know it. He was reckless and dis-

sipated — I could not brook his pretensions. So it came to pass that one morning we had a stormy "scene" — two impetuous natures coming into a volcanic collision, as it were: the consequence, I forbade him ever again to enter my father's house, or to speak to me more. He obeyed, and I believed now hated me, as deeply as he had formerly professed to love. He threw himself recklessly into a circle of society which was beneath him, bringing degradation to himself, and deep grief to his family. He vowed resolutely, in my presence, to do this, should I cast him off; and I as resolutely repudiated the idea of being held responsible for any act of his — past, present, or to come. At this time, I should not have wasted a thought upon him, save that the fact of his association, and that of a desperate gambler, with the original of *the picture*, went far, very far toward sinking that blessed, buoyant hope I had dared to cherish of her innocence and truth.

"Is your woman's faith in woman still triumphant, Henriette?" said Sigismond, sadly, as he handed me up the steps of my home — sadly, but oh! I thought then, so cruelly, too. I burst into a passion of tears — partly for my shaken faith, partly for his unkindness; for though I knew afterward that he did not mean it thus, his words cut me to the heart, and I broke from his arm and ran away to hide myself and weep alone. Oh, the bitter anguish of that hour! The soft June air, so full of life and love, the song of evening birds, the fragrant breath of roses, the glories of a summer's sunset, all came flushing over my bowed head, which lay beneath the open casement; but all the sunshine and music that ever streamed out of a June heaven, could not have lightened up the gloom of that world of shadows which had closed so darkly around my heart!

CHAPTER IV.

PRO ET CON.

But, pity, too, had dues:
She could not leave a solitary soul
To founder in the dark. . . .
He, by man's conscience, she, by woman's heart,
Relinquishing their several 'vantage posts
Of wealthy ease, and honorable toil,
To work with God, at love. . . .
. . . . . I, whose days
Are not so fine they cannot bear the rain,
And who, moreover having seen her face,
Must see it again, . . . *will* see it, by my hopes
Of one day seeing heaven too.

BROWNING.

IMPOSSIBLE! utterly impossible!" exclaimed Monsieur Sauvollée, determinedly.

"No," I said, "it is not impossible, *mon ami*, because it *must* be done. I am *compelled* to save her, Sigismond. Something tells me that it can — it will be done — and that I am the one to do it. I do not see my way clearly now, it is true; the path is a hidden one, but it is one which I must traverse, nevertheless. It may be that when I enter upon it, the Almighty arm upon which I lean will clear away the mists before me; will say, 'Let there be light,' and I shall see my way, step by step, to the desired end. I shall seek direction and support from Him who is 'mighty to save.'"

"Henriette!" he exclaimed impulsively, "I tell you it cannot be! You cannot for one moment realize what you

are talking of; nor can you even imagine the realities through which you will be obliged to pass. Difficulties will meet you at every step — dangers of which you now can form no conception. I would not have you be able even to imagine them. I would have you always as now, full of innocence and purity — knowing no guile — wearing the unsullied spirit and the stainless robes of a saint, and — "

"Your pardon. But I am *not* a saint, Sigismond," I interrupted, (a little impatiently, I fear;) "and even if I were a saint, I should consider it no derogation to endeavor to become a savior of a fellow creature. We can never be too pure, too high, or too holy to attempt doing good; a mortal need never think *he stoops* to an office once filled by a God. The idea of a saint — of St. Cecilia, for instance, the embodiment of innocence and purity, is angelically beautiful — nay, almost divine; and yet, to me, those fair ministers of consolation and redemption, who go down unaided into the gloom and horror of the prison, the hospital, and the mad-house, are diviner still. The ecstasies and miracles of all the canonized saints of old (to my mind) fall far below the life-work of some humble Sister of Mercy — some strong, fearless, and undaunted spirit, who, alone and unknown, fights the 'good fight' for humanity — and so for God."

My listener elevated his dark brows a very little, and then, looking archly into my eyes, said, "I hope *you* are not just about finding out that you have a 'mission,' *ma belle.* I don't appreciate a woman with a 'mission' attached, you know."

"'Answer not a' — simpleton — 'according to his folly,'" I rejoined, smiling in spite of myself. "We all have a 'mission' of some kind, *mon bon.* Some of us are a long time finding out what it is, and some

appear never to find it out. There is no doubt a *purpose* waiting for each one of us when we come to this world: if we never discover what it is, more shame for us. If, however, we know our duty and ignore it by our practice, we are inexcusable. I do not pretend to call this intense desire which is upon me to do something to benefit the original of that haunting picture, a 'mission.' I have no such high-sounding phrase in which to speak of every-day affairs; yet, in verity, this seems to me a portion of the work which I have been placed here to do. Somehow it possesses me like a deep, still madness; it carries me away back into some buried past; it hurries me forward into a hidden future; and it lives everywhere in my present. I have a work to do — *somehow* — and I shall never be happy again until it is done."

"'*Somehow*,'" he repeated. "I cannot think *why* you want to do this for a stranger, or *how* you propose setting about it. Are you not strangely tolerant of the failings of your own sex? Is it not the custom for ladies generally to wrap themselves securely in the velvety mantle of their own righteousness, to gather up their snowy vesture, and bar securely the doors of society against those whom we designate as 'outcast and abandoned?'"

"That is man's creed, I believe," I answered, rather warmly. "For myself, I think I have a basis for *my* belief that woman is really not uncharitable *at heart* to her sister woman. Many of them lack the courage to confess the compassion which I am sure they feel, lest it should be misconstrued, or mistaken for a toleration of wrong, or an affiliation with evil. Many of them think it necessary to *appear* ignorant of all the darker phases of life, because, forsooth, *men do so admire* simplicity and innocence! But this is an hypocrisy generally; an offence against truth, to which no true woman can ever condescend.

There is, it cannot be denied, a good deal of unnecessary, not to say nonsensical cant among men, (usually the worst of them, too,) concerning 'spotless-lily-hood' and 'angelic purity,' and 'seraphic innocence,' and all that sort of thing. Now this is all 'flat, stale,' and exceedingly 'unprofitable.' I don't see that it improves men in the least — nor women either. None of us are either 'lilies' or 'angels' yet; let us try to be *human* and *Christian*. If we attain that degree here, we have the promise that *hereafter* we shall be 'as the angels in heaven' — thank God!"

"You seem to forget, Henriette, that she in whom you are now interesting yourself, in all probability is not desirous of changing her mode of life. From what I can learn of her history, she has been brought up in that atmosphere, her companions are all of that 'circle,' and, doubtless, her mind and heart both bear the stamp of 'evil communications.' It is not natural that it should be otherwise. And, if this should be the case, think for a moment to what you would subject yourself by a contact with such scenes and characters."

"I am not expecting to walk forth upon a primrose path, Sigismond," I said, sadly. "The way of duty is beset by many a thorn, but we are commanded to walk therein, nevertheless."

"How can you prove to me that this *is* the path of duty?" he exclaimed. "If you can do that, *mignonne*, I will listen to your wild plans with more seriousness. But why *you* of all others, and more than all others, should sacrifice your delicacy of feeling, your woman's modesty, your own fair fame, perhaps, (for can you bide the stings of slanderous tongues?) for a stranger and an outcast, I cannot, and I never shall be able to see."

"I cannot 'prove' to you, *mon ami*, that this is *my* duty, unless the consequences prove it," I said, as the great tears

sprang to my eyes. "I could weep my heart away, over the impending fate of this young stranger; but I must not now sit down to idle weeping; I must at least *try* to save her from that fate. While I weep, I must also work; tears without acts, will not avail me. There is something in my own heart which seems to stretch out its arms toward her —that would enfold her, and shield her; something which tells me, too, that despite her position and surroundings, she does not love the life she leads. I cannot think that she has fallen so low as you believe."

He smiled incredulously: still it was a soft, sad smile, as he asked, "But if she should?"

"Then my task will be the greater," I said, quietly. "She must be taught to hate, and then abandon it. As I told you at first, I must go to see her, ascertain how matters stand, and be guided accordingly."

"Henriette, it must not be, my love!" uttered Sigismond, as he came forward to the open window where I stood, and took both my hands in his. "There are a thousand reasons why it cannot be — reasons which you cannot understand — which I dare not offend your ear by explaining. And then, consider, what is it that would *not* be said if such a proceeding on your part were known to the world?"

"The world dare not judge *me* wrongfully. I am far beyond its bitterness and ban," I said, haughtily.

"Ah! believe it not. The world judges us all, and to woman it is a bitter censor. Do not give it one faint shadow by which to pronounce sentence of death against your high and stainless life." His deep tones were laden with a serious tenderness, and he drew me closer to him, as if to shield me from the doom of which he spoke. My heart was giving way to him, but my purpose was not. I loved him, oh! so truly — and yet I said, in a low, firm voice:

"I *must* try to save her, Sigismond."

"Let the consequences be what they may?"

"Even so."

"But you cannot go *there!*" he exclaimed, vehemently. "You cannot go. I had almost said *shall not!* Surely, surely, Henriette, you cannot mean it! It would drive me wild to think of you — alone — in such a —"

"I shall not go alone," I interrupted, while my brimming eyes looked up confidingly to his. "I could not go alone. Oh! Sigismond, my only friend — do not oppose me further — help me! *Pour l'amour de Dieu*, don't leave me to myself! I *must* work, and I *must* have you to aid me."

He was battling with himself — answering not a word; and I went on, hurriedly. "Do not misjudge us. The heart of woman is not always the selfish, unjust, and cruel thing which men would have us suppose. They tell us we trample down each other — that we forgive all things, save 'an erring sister's shame.' We may be severe, when we think of the heights from which she fell; but we weep gentle pity's tears when we remember the depths to which she has fallen. Virtue is, with us, not the cold abstraction which many suppose; the statue heaves and throbs with the strong beating of humanity's great heart; and there is blood—warm, *human* blood, coursing and thrilling through every marble vein. Some of our great modern artists have dared to throw the flush of the rose upon their ideal creations; so a new feeling of warmth, a glow, and color, is flushing the once cold and isolated forms of virtue, purity, and truth. To be pure, we need not be ice. All ice is not stainless, and the whitest angel's wing is warm, and glowing, and full of strong vitality. And we, though we may aspire to do the deeds that angels love, must be human still. I see an angel's work before me, and, human as I am, I *must* go forward. I will go —"

"But," he interrupted, quickly, "not alone. You say you will not go alone."

"And I will not, I promise you. I have two friends who will accompany me; and I can rely on both."

"Who?" he whispered, huskily.

"God, and — *you!* *Mon ami*, do not deny me this. For the sake of my heart's best love, which is yours, sustain me with *your* love. For the sake of the life which we hope to pass together, let no cloud come between us. For the love of God, and the memory of our dear dead mothers, let us save this stranger from a life of sorrow, and a death of darkness. Help me to think how it is to be done, and then help me to do it."

Proudly, with a flushing brow, and

"Strong leaps of meaning in his sudden eyes,"

which said he dared do anything I asked, he drew me closely to his heart. His fine eyes shone with crystal drops, and he murmured, with "tears in his voice," "God bless you, *fleur-de-lis*. Tell me in what way I can assist you. You shall never appeal *to me* in vain."

. . . . . .

The foregoing is only a portion of a conversation which took place on the day after our ride, mentioned in the last chapter. My father was slightly better on that day, and as he had papers to arrange previous to the departure of Monsieur Sauvollée on his business tour up the "Coast," I spent the morning in the drawing-room with Sigismond. He asked me to practise some new duets with him; but I had scarcely sung the first stanzas when visitors were announced. Their stay was not prolonged, and when they left, I rose, and walked to the open window to see them enter their carriage. Just beyond our gateway, an elegant

carriage was passing. In the open carriage sat two beautiful girls, one clad in rose-colored silk, the other in lustrous "ashes of roses." My eyes swam: Sigismond, with a slight start, exclaimed, "There, *ma belle!* do you see?" And we remained just inside the alcove for full three hours, in "converse long and deep" — a portion of our discussion already related. "Tell me in what way I can assist you," my best friend had said. How true it was that I "had never appealed in vain" to him! But now, when my appeal was answered, could I find the way in which he was to aid me? Nay, I childishly left it for him to point out the path, and then assist me to walk in it. As usual, too, I found my reliance well rewarded. We discussed plan after plan, but everything was arranged at last in accordance with Sigismond's first exclamation after I had put the question, "How am I to see Coralie Lesueur?" when he answered, slowly, "One thing is certain — you cannot go *there* — as a woman."

That struck me like a knife; I felt my face paling. Sigismond regarded me earnestly, and said, very gently, "Frightened already? Ah! *m'amour*, you are so true a woman. How will you ever go through with it?"

The blood surged back, covering neck and brow with crimson. Oh, faint-hearted! how is this? But I looked up at my good genius, and said, "It is because I am endeavoring to be a true woman, that I *will* go through with it." "*Deo volente*," he added softly, and we passed out of the room together.

It has been the custom of many to ridicule what is called "newspaper poetry." But I cannot tell you what great things a short "newspaper" poem did for me that day. I cannot express to you how it nerved and energized me; and still I bless the unknown writer, whoever she may be — for I know the words came from a woman. To this

day I thank her for the added power she then bestowed on me, and for the gladness at my heart to know that at least one other woman in the world could feel as I did. I had gone up to my chamber after dinner, carrying with me some of the morning journals. There, while all alone, the struggle came back upon me. How could I dare go anywhere, if not "as a woman"? I felt humiliated at the very thought of unsexing myself. Then I remembered how much Sigismond had given up in order to aid me, and I asked myself, "Can I now go back?" To save myself from my own thoughts, I took up one of the papers — a Memphis journal, if I remember correctly — and read the brief poem which I quote below. It had a weird, haunting sound; and, unconsciously, I connected it in my mind with *the* picture and Coralie. Should *she*, "one more unfortunate," live still amid

"The fires unholy
That scathe and stain"?

Should the hour ever dawn that must see *her* "die degraded," with no ear save Heaven's to hear the "soul-shriek, last and lonely," as her lost spirit fled outward into the "unknown dark"? Never! oh, never! so help me God!

The strange chiming of the strain took possession of me. I read it several times, and now repeat it from memory. It runs thus:

LEONORE.

[In the cemetery of one of our Southern cities, there is a lonely monument bearing this inscription: "THE CHILD OF MISFORTUNE."]

Deeply the midnight knelleth
O'er the wold:
Hoarsely its echo swelleth
Dull and cold,

Down where a dead heart dwelleth
In the mould:
They wail o'er woes unspoken,
And implore
Peace for the lost — heart-broken
LEONORE!

Darkly the night-cloud scowleth,
Hid from sight —
Through it the old moon prowleth,
Wan and white;
And the far tempest howleth
Round the night.
Owls high up in the haunted
Sycamore
Echo a name, wind-chanted —
"LEONORE!"

The spectral tombs grow dimmer:
And the stone
That marks the grave doth glimmer
All alone,
As star-beams o'er it shimmer —
Then are gone.
Thy soul-shriek last and lonely,
From the shore
Of Time, thy God heard only —
LEONORE!

Up from the moaning river,
Sounds of doom
Knell to the shades that shiver
Through the gloom;
Bowed where the yew-trees quiver
O'er thy tomb.
Closely the dank moss creepeth,
Twining o'er
Thy bosom as it sleepeth,
LEONORE!

There, folds of darkness rustle
  Like a pall—
There, 'mid the reed and thistle,
  Shadows fall;
And the rude night-winds whistle
  Over all;
Laughing to scorn the faded
  Days of yore
That saw thee die, degraded,
  Leonore!

Dread as the fires unholy
  That scathe and stain,
The plague-spot, Sin, burned slowly
  In heart and brain;
Till the soul's light sank lowly
  As stars that wane.
Oh! shalt thou be forgiven
  Nevermore?
Nor find thy rest in heaven,
  Leonore?

CHAPTER V.

THE "MAISON DES BIJOUX."

And then the place — that bright, unholy place,
Where Vice lay hid beneath each winning grace
And charm of Luxury; as the viper weaves
Its wily covering of sweet balsam-leaves —
All struck upon my heart, sudden and cold
As death itself. — It needs not to be told —
No, no — I see it all — plain as the brand
Of burning shame can mark; — whate'er the hand
That could from Heaven and me such brightness sever,
'T is done — to Heaven and me she 's lost forever!

MOORE.

VERGING upon dusk on Friday evening — and my faithful Ninette brought into my chamber three voluminous packages, sent up by Monsieur Sauvollée; with this message: "Make no unnecessary delay. I will await you in the drawing-room." I cannot pause now to attempt a description or detail of the various conflicting feelings which assailed me "in force," as I, with Ninette's assistance, appropriated the contents of the packages, for the purpose of transforming myself, for the time being, into a slender and elegant — young gentleman. At last, amid the admiring exclamations of the maid, (who was in my confidence,) my toilette was completed. Everything was *comme il faut,* from the slender boot to the embroidered neck-tie; from the dainty glove and small switch of a cane, to the unexceptionable *chapeau de Paris.* My hair, being already short, was soon tangled into a mass of most boyish curls

by the deft fingers of my maid; and adjusting a delicate false moustache into what we conceived to be its proper position, I sent Ninette to extinguish the hall lamps, lest I might be seen by some of the servants passing about the house. And then, chapeau in hand, half elated and half confused, I descended to the drawing-room. I felt my cheeks glow, and the blush mounted to my forehead as I opened the door. Sigismond, though awaiting me, gave an involuntary start of surprise as I confronted him. Then laughing, he drew me between the tall mirrors, walked round me several times, and exclaimed, "Admirably done! *Adroitement! Ma belle*, who has educated you *faire le beau?* Monsieur, I have the honor to present my congratulations upon your very masculine appearance. Not quite so stiff, if you please; just a trifle more *d'un air dégagé:* there, that is excellent; you make an admirable *petit maître*, Monsieur Henri. Shall we go? Stay: you know well enough how to use this; just as well put it in your side-pocket, there."

"You don't expect to *need* these?" I asked, with some surprise, as I took the pistol he handed me, (my own, by the way,) and glanced at another which he was thrusting into the bosom of his vest.

"No, I don't expect it," he replied, quietly; "but there 's no telling, when a man walks into a hornet's nest, but that he may be stung. These little things are very convenient at times — better than cold steel — greatly to be preferred, I think."

"I cannot see that we need either, *mon cher* Sigismond," I answered.

He laughed gayly, and said, "Perhaps, monsieur, it may be as well for me to caution you. I am not now either '*mon cher*,' or 'Sigismond.' I have the distinguished honor to present to your acquaintance the Señor d'Alvarez —

for this occasion only, as they say in the play-bills; and may I inquire what patronymic you have adopted?"

"I had not thought of this before; but one must have a name. Let mine, upon this occasion, be Monsieur Henri d'Herbelot; my mother's name was D'Herbelot."

"Perhaps that is a reason why you should not use it at present," he said, musingly. "It is a noble name."

"You do not suppose that I intend to dishonor it?" I exclaimed, while the blood shot up into my cheek, and burned there like liquid flame. "No, Sigismond; you do not think that. Rest assured that I shall do no deed for which I should blush to bear my mother's noble name, or on which I should fear to ask her angel blessing."

"I know that, *m'amour*. Take the name, though I confess that to me it sounds too much like your own. In this expedition I seem to wish to forget that you are Henriette d'Hauterive. But we are wasting time. *Allons!*" And we sallied forth. Avoiding the more frequented and fashionable thoroughfares, after turning a few squares, we struck off to the right, and half an hour's walk brought us directly in front of the "Maison des Bijoux."

. . . . . .

A tall, olive-complexioned lackey answered our ring. We presented our cards for Mademoiselle Coralie Lesueur, and immediately were ushered into a stately *salon*, blazing with light, and more than half filled with groups of elaborately dressed women, and easy, rather *insouciant* cavaliers. For a moment my purpose, my strong *will*, even my senses, seemed deserting me. I felt the blood forsake my face, my heart appeared to lose its throb, and, oh! I would have given a kingdom (had it been mine) to have been able to grasp Sigismond's hand. I felt faint in that atmosphere overladen with perfumes. In that dazzling light, dark visions of fear and horror came crowding upon my brain;

my breathing became thick and labored, and involuntarily I stretched out my hand to grasp that of my companion.

"Courage! courage! am *I* not with you?" he found opportunity to whisper hurriedly, as he indicated a vacant seat near an open window, shaded by heavy curtains. I sank, very nearly fell, upon the low divan in this recess, while he took a chair opposite, thus placing himself between me and the company.

Gradually I took courage. From my half-sheltered nook I looked forth, and found sense to separate and *see* the groups before me. The *salon* was a very large and handsome apartment, elaborately adorned and richly furnished. Carpets of velvet covered the floor, vases of rare flowers were placed here and there, a grand piano occupied one corner, and the rainbow glitter of candelabra and chandelier filled my eyes with a dazed and giddy pain. It seemed a hot, scorching light, like that of the meridian sun on desert sands, and seared its way deep into my eyeballs. One fair-browed, sentimental-looking creature, with shoulders whose polished contour struck off the light like a statue, and hair banded *à la Grecque*, sat at the piano; her delicate, clear-cut profile was toward me, and I could not see the face of her attendant cavalier at all. The music was a new waltz, (one I had played myself that very day,) and to its liquid cadence two young girls were floating round the circle in a linked embrace, like fairy-footed Bayadères. A laughing group (ah! what reckless laughter it was!) had formed around a marble table, and were engaged in some game at cards; while another party, directly under the chandelier, were tossing off glass after glass of foaming champagne.

Among these I soon discovered the dark, splendid beauty and bold black eyes of the second portrait we had seen at Moisinett's gallery. She was a blooming,

striking, stylish-looking creature; such as, amid the musical footfalls of the ball-room, you could not but admire; such as, in any other place than this, you might, perchance, have loved. Her costume was a marvel of fitness and effect; and ere I was aware, I caught myself admiring her fearless air, her half defiant mirth, the bold, nonchalant grace of her attitudes, and the careless *abandon* of her dashing manner — never rude, and yet never *womanly*. And out of this rather questionable admiration a true and tender pity took root; for, amid all her carelessness and recklessness, it seemed to me that she knew, and felt, that she was draining a cup of degradation, brimming only with the lees of bitterness and bane. Her dark beauty seemed to me to feed and flourish in that voluptuous, pestilential atmosphere like some gorgeous tropical flower blooming grandly amid miasma and corruption; and yet I seemed to divine also that she well knew this same air only ripened in souls the seeds of destruction and decay. I believed that she could see, as well as I, the fierce passions of men nurtured in that air; crouching in the heart's recesses like terrible wild beasts in the jungles, with eyes aflame and jaws agape, mad with rage and hungering for blood, hurrying off victim after victim to the subterranean dens of infamy, desolation, and despair! True — to the outward eye, no danger was apparent. The poison-draught slept in a chalice of amber and gold; the precipice was fringed with a thousand glowing and gorgeous blooms; the abyss was veiled in clouds of rainbow light and bewildering beauty. To the passing traveller all seemed bloom and brightness, but *I* stood shivering upon a brink I *knew* was there, looking down into deeps darkened by the "blood of souls," and with an icy, deadly shudder creeping into my very soul.

Some five or ten minutes, perhaps, elapsed (though, in

truth, I cannot say how long was the time) while I sat thus, rallying back my failing courage, and reading, with dazed eyes and mystified brain, the scene before me. Then there came "the silken rustle of a dress" near us, and I looked up to see — the original of that bewitching picture — the beautiful Coralie? nay, but a tall woman, with pale hair, and eyes like twin blades of blue, glittering steel: a woman who announced herself as Madame Lesueur, and invited us to follow her. Crossing the hall, she led us into a much smaller and much more elegant apartment than that which we had just quitted.

"Mademoiselle Coralie will see these gentlemen here, in my own private parlor," she said, in a low, silky, premeditated tone, addressing herself to me, while she pierced me through with those steely eyes. "Mademoiselle, *my niece*," she emphasized, "never receives visitors in the *salon;*" then, with an insinuating air, "Addio, señor; adieu, monsieur," amid a profusion of courtesies and well-made smiles, the mistress of the mansion withdrew.

"Did you observe how she looked at me?" I whispered to Sigismond.

"I did, *en vérité*," he replied. "What sharp, hungry eyes she has! I never saw such in the head of mortal before. They dig into your heart after secrets, but they tell nothing of her own."

"Do you think it possible she could have penetrated my disguise?" I murmured, shuddering.

"No! no! surely not. You are an exquisite young gentleman. If you don't believe me, walk over to the mirror there and reassure yourself. You are young, inexperienced — a stranger to such scenes as these: she sees that. *Corragio!* you must not grow nervous, *mignonne*, or everybody will suspect you. Hush! here comes some one — be composed, my darling, I am with you," he whispered

hurriedly — in his solicitude forgetting his own caution to me concerning the rigid sustaining of our incognito. At that moment the door swung open, and Coralie, lovely as a poet's dream, appeared.

"It was the hour for angels: there stood" — mine.

She was accompanied by Madame Lesueur, who presented us; and then retiring to a small sofa at the farther end of the apartment, very quietly seated herself there; and taking up a periodical which lay on a table near her, feigned to read, sheathing the sword-blades of her eyes in the printed page. I knew it was feigning all; I knew that she was watching *me* — "hawking at me with her hungry eyes;" and the thought was such an incubus upon my spirit that I could not be myself; that is to say, I could not satisfactorily play my part. "What was it she was observing in me? Why had she returned, after having bid us 'adieu' but five minutes before?"

Monsieur Sauvollée was, as usual, entire master of himself. He even appeared capable of forgetting *where* we were, and entered into an animated conversation with Coralie, while I — I, as though I had been in truth a lover, sat drinking in deep, intoxicating draughts of beauty, in almost total silence. Ah! how exceedingly lovely she was, as she sat there in her white gossamer robes, in that sumptuous chamber with its silken hangings, its glittering mirrors, its carpets like glowing mosses, its air of fragrance, and its light — which was not simply a light, but a radiance, soft and warm as the stray beams which, in our dreams, come stealing from the pearly gates of paradise. The rosebuds on her bosom, freshly culled, and with drops of evening dew in their half-unfolded hearts, seemed not to me more fresh and pure and sinless than did she who wore them. She was an incarnation of all the visible harmonies of grace — an embodiment of all the exquisite beauties of

June. Her brow was snowy as its clouds; her cheek had the soft flush of its roses; her voice was full of a rich, penetrating sweetness, like the melody of its morning birds; and her eyes were of a deep, delicious, soul-bewildering blue, seeming as full of starry light as is the June sky at midnight. Surely, these were not

"Eyes of most unholy blue—"

nay; but there was, ever and anon, looking out from those large and lustrous orbs a spirit of melancholy inquiry—a something that seemed to be watching and waiting, yet still searching eagerly and eternally for some great good or glory it had lost; yet, the soft light and warmth—the divine atmosphere of young Love appeared to float ever about her: it shone in her sunny ringlets; it fell in the flow of her robe; it frolicked in every graceful motion; and it slept, with the white roses, on her bosom. That triumphant, yet half-unconscious beauty seemed to me as though it might have been nourished on Pæstum roses; the delicate spirit which animated it might have known no companionship save that of gentle, smiling children; and the heart which gave to the whole nature its baptism of "fire and dew," was assuredly a crystal chalice

"With bright nectar overrun
From the wine-vats of the sun."

Do my words appear to you enthusiastic? exaggerated? do you deem them too strong in outline—too vivid in coloring? Alas! I can but give you the brown chrysalis; the Psyche on golden wings flutters ever above me—escapes my eager grasp—mocks me with its inexpressible beauty. I could but exclaim within my heart, when I looked upon the living Coralie, as did one when enraptured with the glowing loveliness of Italy: "Ah! God

must have brooded longer over *this*, than any other of his creations on the face of the world!"

But, I must not linger thus. The hour was not late — perhaps something past eleven — when we made our adieus to the beautiful "bijou," to the eyes of Madame Lesueur, and also to her sumptuously kept "House of the Jewels." As we passed rapidly down Dauphine, Sigismond called my attention to a dark object, seated, or rather fallen across the broken curbstone. This sight, after all the light and luxury of the scenes we had just left, sent a new pallor to my lip and tremor to my heart. The wan lamp-light from the window of a low dwelling-house in front of which she had fallen, revealed to us something having the appearance of the very Hecate of hags. Thick darkness all around her but just where that pallid ray was falling, we saw a crouching figure — a heap of rags, crowned with a loathsome, bloated, passion-harrowed face; such a picture of demoralization, of brutalization rather, as I had never in my life before beheld, and pray I never may again. It was a vision of poverty in its most abject phase, of wretchedness in its most revolting form, of vice and misery in their lowest depths of degradation and despair.

"Is it dead?" I whispered, catching my breath with difficulty, as we paused a moment.

"I cannot tell, certainly. Ought I not to speak to her? to call assistance, or the police? I think it's a woman; the poor, old creature may be dying here in the open street," said Sigismond, after we had passed on a few paces. "I will speak to her, at least," he continued, retracing his steps. I followed him. "My good woman, what is the matter?" he asked kindly, as the head was raised at our approach, and we saw, by the elf-locks straggling round her face, that it was really a woman. "Where is your home? What brings you here?"

In that pale light, I saw two fierce, wild, wicked eyes flash forth, lighting the whole ashen, sunken face, with a Pandemonian glare. "'Home?' I have n't a home! 'What brought me here?'" the hideous creature shrieked: "what brought *me* here? you say; why, such as *you!* Begone! begone!" and she howled out upon our heads her horrid, frenzied curses, till the echo froze my very heart's blood. We turned away, just as the door of the low dwelling opened, and we heard a rough voice exclaim, "Shut up there, you ——!" Then Sigismond caught my arm, and, drawing it through his, hurried me away.

He said not a word until we stood together under the waning light of the hall lamp at home. All was still; the whole household appeared hushed in sleep. Then my good genius took me to his heart; looked gravely down into my pale face; laid back the clinging hair from my forehead, and kissed me, twice. My head fell upon his shoulder, and a few tears stole over my cheek; not so much for what had passed, but for the joy of being safe at home again; and with him.

"It was much too hard for you, *ma mignonne*," he said, with a tremor in his voice. "I feared it would be so; you are unnerved; and it is not to be wondered at. I would have spared you all this, my Henriette. It was my earnest wish that you should know nothing of this wretched phase of life. But you insisted; and you have, by accident, seen it both in its highest and lowest grade; you have seen the *beginning* and the *end*. And the years that intervene are very few. That poor, drunken, half-crazed creature we have just passed, is not old, but misery and crime have done for her the work of long, long years. She will die in the gutter, and in a short time many of Lesueur's beautiful 'mock-diamonds' will take her present place. More than I can tell you, I regret that you have

seen these things: it was not necessary. Good women need not know —"

"But I do *not* regret it, my best friend," I answered, in a low voice. "It is far better that I should know — after a little I shall bear such knowledge better. And, perhaps, if 'good women' generally knew more of the misery that lies around them, they would be more earnest in their endeavors to save some of their own sex who may have 'stooped to folly.' Don't *you* think so?"

"It is very possible that you are right: you are often that way," he replied, with a grave smile. "But — here's Ninette coming down; she has been waiting for you. You are a good girl, Ninon; take your mistress to her room, and see that you make her pillows easy, and that she goes to sleep directly. It is past midnight — good night, *ma belle amante*," and he left me at the foot of the stairs.

How fresh, and cool, and pure my own dear chamber appeared, as I entered it, and how fervently I thanked God for *a home* that night! But it was long after giving voice to that earnest, grateful prayer, before I fell asleep. I heard Ninette breathing calmly in her untroubled slumber on her little couch, in my dressing-room. My humble servitor slept the sweet sleep of a child; but I, her proud, young mistress, had gone down into the sinful and sunless abodes of infamy, and the remembrance haunted me like some terrible spectre. It seemed as though the black arches of some dread inquisitorial hall had, a little while since, closed around me; that I heard the shriek of tortured victims, the groan from lips clamped with iron, the crack of bones upon the rack; the drip of blood on dungeon floors, the fearful, desperate, and final "sharp cry, down *oubliettes!*" My soul, reeling in a great darkness, sighed piteously for the morning — for the white flowers and glad sunshine of a time when all these things were things

undreamed of. I longed to go back once more and *rest* awhile in my child's ignorance and innocence. And then, feeling that this could never be, I panted to ascend again into the clear upper brightness of high-hearted womanhood; to be myself, as I had been but yesterday. But dare I do this, leaving *her* behind, amid the shadows of an "outer darkness," to watch and wail there for evermore? Not so — even in the "thick and press" of mental conflict which I was now undergoing, I felt that if I could go back and be my former self again, without *her*, I would not do it. I meant to go on, despite of Fate; and I felt confident of Sigismond's co-operation and assistance. With his help, and God's help, I could do "all things." He had opposed me at first, but when he promised aid, he gave it, and that with free heart and generous hand. He was large-hearted, like a *true* woman — liberal-minded, like a *real* man. He was not, in brief, one of those

> "Good Christians who sit still in easy-chairs,
> And damn the general world for standing up;"

and so I felt that I could rely upon him in this as in all things. For such a friend, my soul in sweetest gratitude exclaimed, "Blessed be God! the giver of every good and perfect gift."

CHAPTER VI.

IN CARROLLTON GARDENS.

Sunbeams, like draughts of rich, delicious wine,
Come rippling down through amber-colored clouds,
Waking the earth to one exultant song,
While fruits and flowers spring up in glittering crowds;
Magnolia-blooms light up the twilight woods,
Their creamy blossoms showering rich around;
While orange-blooms fling down their crowns of gold
In princely largesse to the waiting ground.

M. E. B.

Time rules us all. And life is not
The thing we planned it out ere hope was dead;
And then, we women cannot choose our lot.
— Much must be borne which it is hard to bear;
Much given away which it were sweet to keep —
God help us all!

JULIA WARD HOWE.

WHEN can we see you again, mademoiselle?" I had inquired of Coralie, just as we were about departing from the "Maison des Bijoux." She did not reply just at the moment; but Madame Lesueur, who had crossed the room as we rose to leave, said, in her smooth, satiny way, while she impaled me with her eyes: "Shall I answer for you, mademoiselle? You will go to Carrollton to-morrow morning — you and *la belle* Marguerite."

"And shall I have the pleasure of meeting you there?" I asked, still addressing Coralie. She blushed, and I imagined would have been glad to bow consent, yet she did not. Evidently she was confused at the thought of an

"appointment" with a gentleman. Madame decided the case in her adroit way. "*Les demoiselles* are under a promise to go to Carrollton to-morrow morning — gentlemen visit the Gardens — sometimes they meet ladies — by accident merely," and she concluded with a short, sharp laugh, which grated upon my sensibilities. I shrank away from it as one does from the dentist when he is filing a tender tooth. With this understanding we took our leave. Therefore "Carrollton" was the first thought which took possession of my mind when I awoke in the morning.

As I have said, it was late ere I could compose myself to sleep: the little pendule in my dressing-room struck three; then I heard no more. I fell into a slumber, deep and dreamless, like that of the dead. It was, however, an exhausting rather than refreshing sleep; and when I awoke with "the Gardens" on my mind, it was also with a dull pain in my eyes, and a weary sense of languor, as if every limb were hung with fetters of lead. Before going down to breakfast I called Thomas, who was waiting at my father's door, and inquired for his master.

"He had a bad night, mistus — bad dreams — talking all night long."

"Knock, Thomas, and inquire whether I can see him?"

"Please, mistus, he 's dozed off — jis' about half an hour back; maybe he 'll sleep a matter of five or six hours now," said the man.

"Very well, Thomas; do not allow him to be wakened; keep everything perfectly quiet, and I hope he may get a refreshing sleep. Are the shutters all closed?"

"Yes, mistus; I 've fixed everything right. No danger of him wakin' up now for some hours; he took his — his drops, I mean."

"Drops! Is he taking medicine? has he called in a physician? has Eugene seen him? You have not done

well in concealing this from me, Thomas!" I exclaimed, with some impatience.

"Oh, no, no, miss! there's no doctor been sent for, no medicines been tuk at all — jis master's drops he's been takin' for years agone, when he can't sleep, wich is wery often — poor master!"

"Oh, is that all?" I said, not wishing to exhibit any surprise in presence of the servant, though I felt it. "Very well, Thomas; keep all very still. I will see my father when he wakes;" and I glided softly past him and went down stairs. "Drops! drops!" I kept saying to myself; "why, and for what? 'Takin' for years agone?' What does that mean?" I never knew my father to take medicines. Perhaps he might often have been suffering, and I knew nothing of it. It saddened me to think how long I had been with him — his daughter, and yet comparatively a stranger. Perhaps I had been remiss in my filial duty. True, he did not invite confidence; but had I striven earnestly enough, hopefully enough to gain it? Such questionings of myself troubled me as I entered the breakfast-room, where I found Monsieur Sauvollée awaiting me, with the open morning papers lying in a cloud around his easy-chair.

"Late — very late, *ma belle*," he said, smiling, as I entered; then, in a moment, as I approached him, "How pale you are! You disobeyed orders, and did not go to sleep, as I insisted you should. I shall hold Ninon responsible for this; you are not well to-day, *amante*."

"Oh, yes! very well! only slightly dormant. Come; when I take some coffee, I shall be as wide awake as ever; for we must run up to Carrollton this morning, you remember!"

"Nay," he answered; "I'll aid and abet your wild schemes no longer; last night was too much for you. I

will not have pallid cheeks and heavy eyes laid to my account. *Quel avantage en reviendra-t-il?*"

"*Some* good will come of it — I cannot tell you just yet what it is to be," I said. "However, I do not think my face and eyes are at all affected by last night's adventures. I am troubled about something else, Sigismond." Then I went on, in my usual frank, confidential way, to tell him of the conversation which had just taken place between myself and Thomas, and that I feared I had not done all a daughter's duty toward my father.

Sigismond laughed outright as I concluded, exclaiming, "*Ouais!* will anybody only listen to that! Let a woman alone for tormenting herself, and making her conscience a Fakir's bed of spikes! As the ploughman poet has it,

> 'When nae real ills perplex them,
> They *make* enough themselves to vex them!'

To hear you talk, *fleur-de-lis*, one would suppose that you had committed the 'seventy' and *eighth* sin, for which forgiveness is not commanded. Let me, however, absolve you. Let me assure you that you *have been* and *are* a dutiful daughter, doing all that you were allowed to do. As to monsieur your father's medicine, believe me, that is just nothing at all. Some simple sedative or nervine; his having used it for years with no perceptible effect is sufficient proof of its innocuousness. *Allons, m'amour;* we must really go forth in search of something new as a source of trouble. What shall it be?" and again he laughed cordially.

His gay manner was sincere — therefore it was effective; it was contagious, too, and I gave him back some of his smiles, as I replied: "We can easily find a fountain of trouble, and perhaps we shall gather some tears from it also, if you persist in refusing to go with me to the Gardens

this morning. There are some new flowers in bloom there, which I wish to examine," I added, as a servant, entering with the hot toast, overheard my last remark.

"*Oui;* two new flowers — both very brilliant — the one a rose, the other 'ashes of rose.' Very well, I am at your command for to-day, mademoiselle," said Monsieur Sauvollée, as he sipped his *café noir*. After breakfast he came up to me and said, *sotto voce:* "Anything to bring back the roses to your cheek and the life to your eye; the fresh air at Carrollton will probably do it. Let us not delay, however, as it is near ten now, and a train leaves at half-past. Can we be ready for it?" he asked, looking at his watch.

"Certainly."

"Well, where's Ninon? Let her bring your hat and mantle, while I —" but just at that moment he bethought himself of the incognito, and whispered, as a quick color flashed up to his forehead: "Ah! you can't do it, Henriette; you can't possibly go out in daytime in *that way*. How, in the name of all masquerading, could you leave the house?"

I thought a few moments. It was clear to me that if I did not go *en cavalier*, I could not go at all. Then I said promptly, "I will risk it. 'Nothing ventured, nothing have.' Go to the 'Old Date Tree,' at the corner of Orleans and Dauphine; in half an hour I will meet you there. *Au revoir,*" and I ran up stairs wonderfully brightened by the excitement of anticipation and necessity to be "up and doing." With the assistance of my good Ninette, I speedily accomplished what I had promised, and Monsieur Sauvollée half started to see me coming up to meet him as he approached the lonely Date Tree.

"*Is* it you? and where did you spring from? I confess I had no idea that you would really meet me here," he laughed, looking into my eyes to assure himself it was

"*mignonne en vérité,*" as he said. "Ay! those eyes belong to '*l'ame de joie.*' *Votre serviteur*, Monsieur d'Herbelot. What a dashing young chevalier you make, to be sure! I can see no reason why you may not carry off the heart of this pretty 'ashes of rose.' That would be an odd *denoûment* to your adventures, Monsieur Henri." And his playful remark set me to thinking. I *was* a very passable young gentleman — there was no denying the fact; my cheval-glass said so over and over again. Very youthful, and a trifle effeminate — *mais, n'importe.* Suppose that Coralie Lesueur should — yes, *should love me* in my assumed character, and that, through the holy influence of that love, I should be able to lead her into a better life? Might not the way to save her be opening up before me? The disguise was a cross to me; I blushed crimson when I put it on; but I had adopted it per force, as nothing else would serve for a visit to the "Maison des Bijoux." Would it not be better for me to keep up the deception still, and see what would come of it? True, the longer it was retained, the more difficult and embarrassing would be the *éclaircissement* which *must* take place at last. For the present, I had no alternative; things must take their course. My cogitations were brought to a sudden stop by our arrival at the station. We took our seats, and a pleasant run of a few minutes brought us to Carrollton.

"Will you have an ice or a prime Havana, Monsieur Henri?" inquired Sigismond, smiling, as we passed in front of the hotel. The long galleries were crowded with gentlemen loungers — smoking, chatting, or reading the morning journals. I felt, for a few moments, when I stepped off the train, directly in front of all that company, as though every eye was upon me; as though every one penetrated my disguise, and *knew* that I was the proud Creole belle — last scion of the house of De Hauterive.

Passing my arm within that of my companion, apparently in a playful, *bon-camarade* style — but in reality for support — we passed the galleries as nonchalantly as possible; turning away at once into the broad walks that interlaced each other among the trees and shrubbery.

"Monsieur! there are your new floral discoveries," exclaimed M. Sauvollée, nodding toward the left. I followed his indication: — there they were, sure enough. The "rose" stood at a cross-walk, coquetting in her sultana-like way with three young "exquisites" of the *haut ton*, (two of whom I knew;) the "ashes of rose" was walking leisurely down a vista beyond — and alone.

"The gods are propitious," I quoted, looking at Sigismond. "Yes — now 's your time, darling; go on, and engage her in conversation, while the other is occupied. I will not accompany you in the character of Monsieur *de trop;* I will walk back to the hotel, for I am perishing for a cigar; and, one hour hence, will be at the fountain waiting for you. Walk with your *protégée* in that direction, so that when I arrive I may feel that you are not far from me. I almost fear to lose sight of you, though. But go — make good use of your one hour, for you must not overstay that time, or I shall be in horrors of suspense." He looked into my eyes encouragingly, pressed my hand, and turned back. I walked quickly on, avoiding Marguerite and her admirers, and overtook my "ashes of rose." A faint color flushed both cheek and brow as I accosted her with the usual salutations of the morning, and then, with an easy grace which was all her own, she talked to me, as we sauntered along the smooth walks in the direction of the fountain — penetrating deeper into the greenery of the Gardens. In a very few minutes I looked back — we had lost sight of every one. We were at no great distance from the spot designated by Sigismond; I approached Coralie, drew

her arm within my own, and led her into the thick shadow, where there stood a rustic seat, overhung by long, flexile, drooping boughs. She was flushed and startled, looking at me wonderingly, as I seated her there, and, as is my wont, plunged at once into *medias res.*

"Pardon me; I love you, and I have but one hour to spend with you. In that time I am anxious to learn all I can of you — of your heart and history. You see, I do not go to others for information; I come directly to yourself. Do not be surprised at my frank address; if I am abrupt, forgive it. Do not fear me, but tell me as frankly all about yourself. Can you trust me, mademoiselle?"

"Yes," she said, slowly, repressing her agitation, while the sad expression deepened on her face, and the curved lip quivered a very little. "Yes, I will — I *do* trust you. You carry truth in your eyes, and you do not address me as men usually speak to us — with honeyed words, which are such a mockery; with compliments, which are so humiliating. You speak honestly, even to me; as though you might have a good mother, and for her sake could not forget to respect her sex. Perhaps, if I had had such a mother I should not this day be — what I am."

Ah! how beautiful she was to me then, as these sad words came sighing from her lips, and large tears stood in her eyes of "heaven's own delicious blue!" I looked at her through tears too, (remembering all the while how *unmanly* it was,) and it was a lovely picture I saw through those "diamond lenses." Her costume was as faultless as her beauty. The hat, of some snowy material, with a blush-rose and lilies of the valley dropping over the brim, was no longer an article of attire, but a part of *her.* The shawl of rich lace had fallen away from her shoulders, and the silken sheen of the quiet "ashes of roses" fell and flowed away in shining folds around a form such as, in

other days, awoke the Spirit of Beauty in the souls of Phidias and Canova. As I sat there beside her, under the June skies, an indefinable emotion took possession of me; the same feeling which enthralled me when I first looked upon her portrait in Moisinett's gallery. Into her face — that sweet, pure face — I gazed with an eager, panting, insatiate longing; struggling to solve that *something* which, in the picture and in the face, so fascinated me; and, in doing this, I grew dizzy and bewildered, and for a few blind moments lost myself. In striving to rescue this *something* (whatever it was) from the deeps of the unknown and incomprehensible, my brain seemed to reel, and my heart to give out a wild cry, like that of

"Some strong swimmer in his agony."

When I would follow some thought-clue on and on, in the ever vain effort to grasp that ignis fatuus, down into a void of nothingness it sank — lost, all lost — the very thought from which it sprang utterly annihilated!

The tones of a distant cathedral bell roused me — recalled me to myself — admonished me that time was flying.

"But your life, your present life, Coralie, is it a happy one?" I asked, hurriedly. She raised her large, mournful eyes to mine, and repeated, "Happy?"

It was as if some lost angel in the far deeps of an "outer darkness" had murmured in his dream, "Heaven?" There was in it a questioning, a despairing doubt whether there could be any such thing in existence. Then, in a more cheerful tone, she resumed, "Let me not be ungrateful. Let me still thank Heaven that I am not so — so old in this wretched life as some. It is not so much what it is, as what it may be to me, that renders me most miserable — at times. As yet, I have seen only the sunny side; its luxuries, its pleasures, its gayeties; but oh! I *know* there is

another side, and the thought makes me shudder. I know, too, how the world regards me, and that is bitter, bitter! I have longed for something which could lift me out of and beyond this weary life, as one might sigh for angels' wings to bear him far above this earth, into a heaven of which he has only heard and dreamed."

"And you would leave this life, were it in your power?" I cried, fixing my eyes intently upon hers.

"Ah! why should I not?" she asked, sadly. "Does the worm refuse the golden wings which make it such as that?" she added, pointing to a splendid butterfly which floated gayly past us. "I have nothing to lose, everything to gain, by such a change."

"Why, then, dearest Coralie, in the name of high heaven, *why* do you not make this change? Why do you not shake off the fetters which bind you to a base life, and rise triumphant into a purer world — a virtuous womanhood?"

"You talk *like a man* now, sir," she answered, mournfully. "You forget, as men are apt to do, that you are talking to a woman. Were *you* in my place, it would be an easy task to you thus to 'cast off the fetters which bind you to a base life;' but with *me* the case is different — darkly, bitterly so. The world would offer *you* its hand, assisting you to rise; the world would set its iron heel upon *my* neck, for the mere attempt to rise."

"Not so — not so: you would find a thousand friends to help you!" I asserted.

"I have lived eighteen years, and I have never, as yet, found even *one* of that thousand," she replied, with a dash of bitterness in her low, melancholy tones.

"You have at least found *one*," I again asserted, meaningly.

"And you are he?" she inquired.

"By all my hopes of heaven, yes—if you will allow me to be so. God knows how gladly I will be that friend to you—how willingly I will serve you!"

She looked up into my face for some moments—reading it thoroughly, as young children do ofttimes; then, without withdrawing her gaze, laid her small hand in mine, and said, with the sweetest sincerity, "I do believe you, Monsieur d'Herbelot." Instantly, however, as if recollecting herself, she added, with a sigh, "How Marguerite would laugh at me for saying so!"

"Why should she laugh at you? Who and what is Marguerite?" I asked.

"Ah! you don't know *la belle* Marguerite? She is a woman who has no belief *in anything;* and that is why she would laugh at the confidence I place in *you.* Marguerite believes 'not man, nor woman either;'—though I have heard her say that IF there be any difference between right and wrong—IF what men call 'right' wins heaven—and IF indeed there be a heaven at all—she thinks, perhaps, that I may go there! If she believed in anything, that exception would be—myself. We are companions—I had almost said 'friends;' but that is a word so much abused. Madame Lesueur wishes it so; we form (she says) so fine a *tableau vivant.* We are associates, yet very different. Marguerite is three years my senior—she has, alas that I should say it! she has taken the last irrevocable step in error from which the tendency is ever—downward. I am an unfortunate creature—but, thank God, despite the sphere in which I live, an innocent one. And, come what may, so I will die!"

"Swear to me!" I uttered, in a voice that was almost a sob, shaken to my heart's deep centre by her joy-inspiring words—"Swear to me, by the stainless heaven above us, that your words are true!"

"Why should I swear? It is only truth," she said, solemnly. "Could I sit here and talk to you of a better life, if I had once passed the burning gate of shame, and heard it close for aye behind me? Could I *then* dare to raise my eyes to a purer day, while that 'gloom of glooms' encompassed me forever? Dare I ever again hope for myself, having once passed that portal on whose iron arch is written, 'Leave *Hope* behind thee?'" She spoke hurriedly, excitedly, carried completely away by her feelings. And I? Tears, rejoicing tears rained down my face: overmastered by the impulse of the moment, I clasped her to my throbbing heart. My woman's soul rose triumphant then; I forgot, in my unutterable joy and thankfulness, that I was wearing a character not my own — that I was not (apparently) Henriette de Hauterive, but Henri d'Herbelot! Heavens! what was I doing? I realized my mistake instantly, as Coralie, in a glow of confusion, quickly disengaged herself; then I blushed quite as violently as she, and we sat facing each other, utterly confused and silent — but from what different causes! She was the first to speak — when she had time to *think*, she was not offended. Looking at me frankly, with an almost childlike sweetness, she said softly, "You weep, sir — weep for me: therefore I trust you."

"Oh! trust me wholly — trust me ever!" I exclaimed. "I weep, it is true; and it is *womanly* to weep, is it not? But mine are happy tears; you have given me tidings of 'exceeding joy.'"

"Yes," she said, slowly, as if talking to herself, "you *talk* like a man, but you *feel* like a woman. You have a man's tongue, but a woman's heart, monsieur."

"Then will you not trust me, dearest Coralie? Tell me your history — let me read your heart," I said, taking up

gently the little gloved hand which lay upon the iron railing of our seat.

"I have nothing strange to tell you, my friend," she replied. "I am called the niece of Madame Lesueur, and I bear her name. Doubtless I am in the wrong when I have devoutly wished there were no ties of blood between us. I have no right — no reason to hope this. Frankly I tell you that I have this feeling — that I cannot help it; at the same time, I confess that it is ungrateful, for Madame Lesueur has been very kind to me. I do not remember a time when I was anything but her niece, though she evades all my questions respecting my parents. It must have been that my father and her husband were brothers, as I am called Lesueur. I was educated as a lady's child ought to be, at the convent of the Sacred Heart, and madame my aunt has engaged masters for me since my return to her house. She indulges me, now, very greatly — never having asked me to do anything for which a woman should blush; that is, if I can judge correctly — but perhaps I cannot. She insists sometimes upon my doing things which are disagreeable to me personally, as, for instance, to ride with Monsieur Berthêl and receive his passing attentions. I acknowledge that Monsieur Berthêl is not agreeable to me, though he appears to endeavor to make himself so; nor could I exactly explain to you *why* I do not like him. He has much influence over my aunt — neither can I explain why this is so. I heard her say to herself this morning, 'They can go to Carrollton; Berthêl has gone across the lake.' She did not know I overheard her remark: I had just entered her room — she was passing through a side door into the balcony. What misfortunes may be in the future for me, I cannot tell — of course, I have my hours of wretchedness and fear, anticipating them. As yet, Madame has been kind to

me; I am not obliged to associate with those who frequent the *salon*, but I often appear in public with Marguerite; and this is by my aunt's special desire. I meet gentlemen frequently in her own parlor — always in her presence, however, except twice, when M. Berthêl called upon me in company with two other gentlemen. And, monsieur my friend, this is all."

"That is all?" I said to myself: truly it seemed plain and matter-of-fact enough. Somehow, I was convinced against my will, too, that this was not "all." It was all that Coralie knew, I felt assured; still there was something "behind the scenes." I must study it out.

"Why did Madame Lesueur scrutinize me so keenly last evening?" I asked, thinking to put Coralie off her guard, if indeed she were guarding herself at all.

"I do not know why, sir. I noticed that she regarded you closely — she often does this when she is anxious to 'read' a person, as she says. But she is a keen woman, and studies people with much skill. I think she is pleased with you; she was anxious that we should come to Carrollton this morning; when we left, she called me aside and said:

"'Should you meet M. d'Herbelot, give him your smiles;' and then she called over your name twice, appearing to ponder on it." Coralie spoke with frankness. I had no reason to doubt her.

"*Oui*, she is a keen woman, and, if I mistake not, a deep one — perhaps dangerous, also," I remarked.

"Do not judge her harshly, monsieur," pleaded the soft, low voice at my side. "Circumstances, perhaps, have made her what she is. All the women in her sphere of life are not the hardened and wicked creatures which, doubtless, you imagine them. There, for example, is Marguerite — a woman utterly without confidence in anything

human: a woman who will not believe that men are ever actuated save by some sordid or selfish motive; a woman who scoffs at the very name of truth, and love: why, I have seen her throw off her rich cloak in the streets to wrap it round a sick and shivering sewing-girl, who, she would say, with a scornful laugh, was 'trying to keep honest, and starving body and soul by it.' I have seen her spend her last dollar for bread for poor, famished children, whom she met in the streets. One evening last winter — soon after I came from the convent — we went out for a promenade; and returning, when nearly opposite the Cemetery, we met a beggar-child with a beautiful Italian face, bareheaded, and limping along the cold pavement with bare, brown feet, one of which was bleeding, marking the stones at every step. 'God help me!' exclaimed Marguerite, as her eye fell upon him; 'that child is the image of ——.' The name escaped me, or she did not say it aloud; but she stopped before him, stooped down, and bound up his foot with her embroidered handkerchief; took off her fine, heavy shawl, and wrapped it around him; gave him a half-eagle, which was all she had in her pocket at the time, and said vehemently, with her eyes full of tears, 'Now go — go; and *never* let me see you again.' And yet Marguerite declares that she has no belief *in anything* that is good, or generous, or disinterested. No, monsieur, do not judge them too harshly. Consider, too, how much *your* sex has to answer for, in — ah! there is Señor d'Alvarez — has he come to seek you?"

I looked through the sheltering boughs: there stood Sigismond at the turn of a walk, between us and the fountain, evidently anxious and impatient. "He is waiting for you — leave me now, monsieur," said Coralie.

"First, allow me to find your companion, *belle* Marguerite," I replied.

"No, no; I can find her easily. I do not wish to return to her just yet. She brings back the realities of my life with her. I shall find her soon enough."

"When can I see you again, dearest Coralie?"

"On Monday evening, when the old Cathedral bell rings for vespers, I will be in the 'Place d'Armes,'" she answered, after a moment's thought.

"I will meet you there. Till then, good-by, *au soin de Dieu*," I whispered, pressed her hand, and left the lovely lady sitting in the shadow.

"Great heavens! what anxiety you give me!" exclaimed Sigismond, in a low tone, as I joined him. "I've walked two miles, round and round this trysting-spot, seeking you. In the name of wonder, where have you been? It's more than half an hour past the time; and we must wait for the twelve-o'clock train."

"I've been sitting over there — under those trailing boughs of —"

"All the time? Not thirty paces from me?" he questioned.

"All the time; and *she* is there still. Let us go. Ah! *mon ami*, I've such joyful news for you. I'll tell you all about it as soon as we reach home." I did so, after our safe arrival; and his fine eyes bore very suspicious evidences of tears, as he again took me to his heart, and said, in broken tones, "God bless you for a noble woman!"

CHAPTER VII.

THE PLACE D'ARMES.

The light in her blue eyes serene
Was lit of Heaven — those yearning eyes,
A wistful look would to them rise:
Some spirit strayed from Paradise,
Who might not earthly language speak,
Within her melancholy eyes
Might wear such look as I have seen
Pleading in thine.

MARY E. BRYAN.

My soul is drunk with gazing on this face;
I reel and faint with it! In what other world
Have I traced all its lineaments before?
I know them!
I'll hide this fatal picture
From sight once more, for till she made me look on't
I did not know my weakness.

N. P. WILLIS.

PROMISE me, *m'amour*. You must give me that assurance. I cannot leave you unless you do. I shall be anxious, restless, unhappy, dissatisfied—in brief, everything that is uncomfortable, all the time I am gone, unless you give me your word that you will not attempt to see your *protégée* during my absence. Promise, *fleur-de-lis!*" said Monsieur Sauvollée. He spoke hurriedly, earnestly; clasping both my hands tightly within his own.

"After this evening, Sigismond."

"True, that is what I mean. You can see her here this evening, of course; but do not remain late; be at home by

eight, at furthest. I wish, as your affairs now stand, that I was not obliged to leave just at present; but I am compelled to do it. It is your father's business, and I cannot postpone it, as I should be tempted to do were it only my own. I am two days behind time already, and those old planters will lose confidence in me if I delay in their affairs; they look for me to be prompt to the hour."

"I *do* wish you were not compelled to go," I said. "Something whispers that I shall need you. I do not think my father at all well to-day, and fear I shall be obliged to send for Dr. Dupont, notwithstanding his strong opposition."

"No; I do not think that is necessary," he replied; "I was with your father all the evening, on Saturday, after our return from Carrollton, receiving instructions, making out estimates, and so forth, and thought he appeared quite as usual. But it is your new *protégée* and her affairs I am alluding to; this renders me unwilling to leave at present. I wish to see her removed from such associations as now surround her, and that speedily. Something must be done for her; what, I cannot yet determine. I have thought it all over a hundred times, and yet I cannot see how *we* are to take her out of those associations without her aunt's consent, and the woman will never give her up willingly; of that I am convinced. Madame regards her beautiful relative as too rich a prize to be thrown away after that fashion. At all events, curb your impatience, and rest perfectly quiet until my return. I promise faithfully then to accomplish your design in some way or other, at present known only to *le bon Dieu.* I should go wild to think of your exposing yourself in this guise — having conferences with Lesueur, and I not beside you. You could not play that *rôle* without me, *m'amour:* strong and spirited, and (pardon me) slightly self-willed as you are, you have not the

strength and spirit and will for *that*. Now, promise me, *fleur-de-lis*."

"I do promise," I responded; "provided no unforeseen exigency occurs. But, if immediate action should be necessary, I shall be strong enough to act; and I shall compel myself to it."

"There is not the slightest necessity whatever for any action in the matter, and will not be, for a few days, at least. Let affairs remain precisely as they are until my return. Let me see — Assumption, Iberville, East Baton Rouge — I shall be gone but eight or ten days, at the very furthest. Surely you can wait that long without impatience, *mignonne*. Just think of it — on this day of last week you did not know there was such a person living as Coralie Lesueur. Can you not forget, for a few days, this fascinating stranger — and remember only him who has loved you — always?"

"How like *a man* that was! No fear of your forgetting yourself;" and I laughed up in his serious face. "But, I grant all you may choose to ask, if you, in your turn, will promise that all the while you are absent you will be thinking out and planning *some* way to break off Coralie's present connections."

"*De tous temps?* nay, that 's 'too much of a good thing,'" he answered, smiling in his peculiar manner, which was both calm and gay. "I 'll do my best, however. I 'll devote to such cogitations all the spare moments I can rescue from long calculations, prosy accounts, promises to pay, etc., besides the gratuitous thought I am compelled to give to the person and welfare of my young friend, Monsieur d'Herbelot."

"My best friend, think of it as a matter that very nearly concerns *my* welfare and happiness — a matter which I have taken very seriously to heart, which I feel

must be —" I paused; interrupted by the first sudden peal of the vesper-bell from the old Cathedral tower; and almost at the same instant the bell of the steamer upon which Sigismond was to embark sounded sonorous and clear over the Levee.

"There! that's the packet's last bell, and Pierre will be wondering what has become of me," Sigismond exclaimed. "I must hurry, or be left. That's the vesper-bell, too — and see! yonder come your expected "belles" also, through the gates. Good-by, good-by, my love; think that I am folding you to my heart of hearts. If you should think it best, send for Eugene to-morrow. Above all, until I return — *soyez tranquille. Mais, quoi que ce soit qui arrive, faites le moi savoir.* Once more, good-by, and God bless you, my angel — *my wife,*" and he wrung my hand painfully, and was gone. "*Dieu vous bénisse,*" I murmured, as he passed from view.

Doubtless it would have seemed rather odd, had he been overheard by the people passing about us, to address an elegant young *gentleman* as "love," and "angel," and more especially as "*wife;*" but I had no reason to suppose he was overheard. We were standing together in a rather retired spot, in that corner of the Place d'Armes, (now Jackson Square,) in full view of the gates, and on the side next to the Pontalba Buildings. Some shrubbery partially concealed us; no one could see us from the street outside, although so near; but, within the Square, persons were continually passing, and ever and anon groups of people sauntered by our only half-hidden stand-point. An irresistible feeling of utter loneliness and sadness came over me, as Sigismond disappeared from my view down the broad walk. Our "long talk" and *real* parting was over before we left home; and the brief conversation just related took place after we arrived at our rendezvous, and while he was

waiting for the steamer's last bell. As he bade me adieu I caught a glimpse of the two "expected belles" — they were just entering the Square. I could not go out to meet them, just then. I paused in my partial concealment to throw off the woman — the saddened, tender woman who had just parted with the one she loved best on earth. I must put down myself; I must have time to assume the air, the manner, the necessary nonchalance of the easy, elegant cavalier which it was my part to play. I stood there alone, for some fifteen or twenty minutes perhaps, crushing down the woman in my heart, trampling down *myself*, and calling up the character which was to correspond with my exterior. Alas! I had some difficulty in doing this. I felt alone, unfriended, unprotected; I missed Sigismond's kind glance, his encouraging smile, his strong and ever-ready, sustaining arm. All *the woman* in my nature surged to the surface, overwhelming the force and strength of will which Sigismond, frequently in his laughing way, called "masculine." And then, in the very midst of my weakness, came the thought that near me was a sister-woman, alone, unfriended, unprotected, and in *real* danger, while mine was but imaginary. I heard this woman calling upon *me* for aid, for sympathy, for hope, for more than life, and ah! it was wonderful how this thought fired my brain, tensioned up my courage, and roused all my drooping energies! "It *must* be; I will go forth in a strength that is not my own," I exclaimed, half aloud; "I will now go to seek her — perhaps, save her. Oh! help my weakness, Thou who art all-powerful! Father, guide and guard me as Thy child! Teach me to remember that 'the race is not always to the swift, nor the battle to the strong!'"

Without waiting one moment, lest I should lose the enthusiasm with which this impulsive prayer inspired me,

I hastily left my retreat, and stepped out fearlessly (or apparently so, at least) into the open space. Groups of gay pleasure-seekers, out for their evening stroll, were passing and repassing; laughing ladies, with their attendant cavaliers; companies of young men of the town; parents, with their frolicsome children; and tawny or ebony nurses, with their arms full of baby innocence and loveliness. I had gained nearly the centre of the Square, when I remarked the two "roses" advancing toward me from an opposite direction. They no sooner caught sight of me than Coralie turned suddenly and walked back in the direction from which they came, while her companion still advanced toward me.

"*Bon soir*, Monsieur d'Herbelot," she nodded carelessly as we met. "We are looking for a lady fair, are we not? She can be found in a rather isolated spot in yonder farthest corner of the grounds, where there is a little seat behind a clump of low trees — this way — *comprenez vous?*" and she threw up her dainty hand over her shoulder, indicating the direction Mademoiselle Lesueur had taken. I assented. "*Ah! bien*, follow her then," she said, turning away.

"Thank you, mademoiselle," I whispered, and passed her.

"Thank me for nothing," she replied, with a slight sneer.

"Stay — stop, sir!" she added, in a low, distinct tone. Then, with an expression half contemptuous, half amused, she drew nearer to me, and said, "Now, how like a senseless man that was! Dashing headforemost after his passion, if his neck breaks in the race! Is there no way, sir, to follow a lady, except to dog her footsteps, like bloodhounds upon a fresh trail? You silly boy, look where you step, when you tread among adders."

Her sneer was cutting, but perhaps it was kindly, too; so, though I felt the hot blood rush up into my forehead, I profited by it: turning away, I sought the place of meeting by a more circuitous route. I felt indignant that a woman such as she should address me thus; but, as I "hastened slowly" on my way to Coralie, the thought flashed upon me, What right have I to be angry? I belong to the human race, which she despises; I belong (seemingly) to that sex which it is her pride to play upon and deceive; and then, when I have voluntarily descended to *her* sphere, is it to be wondered at if she regards me only as her *equal?* perchance her *inferior?* No, no — I have come down into the ranks of infamy, and I must both brook and bear what I find there.

"Henri! you have come at last!" uttered Coralie, in a low, half frighted tone, as I put back the heavy foliage, and sprang to her side. It was an embowered, secluded spot, seeming some little Isle of Peace, for past it the human tide surged and murmured like a restless, rocking sea. I had bounded to her side, stole my arms around her, and whispered, "I love you, Coralie," (half forgetting that I was *a man*, made me seem over-bold, no doubt, to *her*,) before I became aware that she was trembling violently, like a dove in the serpent's coil; that her fair sweet face was pale, very pale, and her lips tremulous—almost colorless. There was a look of expectation, an eager, asking gaze in her large eyes, and I in a moment divined that she was excited, and had something to communicate.

"What is it, dearest Coralie?" I whispered. "You are agitated — why is this? Why do you tremble so? Tell me — tell me!"

She did not reply, but hastily unwrapping her delicate handkerchief, she handed me its contents: a piece of folded paper, and a small gold-encased miniature. I took up the

little picture — it was an exquisite painting — and beheld, with intense astonishment, a very striking likeness of myself — not as Henriette de Hauterive, but as Monsieur Henri d'Herbelot!

"Where in the round world did you get this, my dear?" I cried. "Sure I am that I never sat for such a picture; and yet it is very like one which I gave only a short time ago to Sigis — I mean, it is like one I gave to — Señor d'Alvarez, on the first day of this month: it was taken on my *jour de naissance*, the first of June."

"*The first of June!*" ejaculated Coralie; "why, that is *my* birthday! And, just look at this!" She turned the back of the picture, and I saw, encircled by a wreath of forget-me-nots, this inscription, "HENRI;" and directly below this, "JUNE 1st, 1834." My brain reeled; I felt as if stricken — stunned by some trenchant blow from an invisible and supernatural source. My breath came thick, my eyes were dazed and swimming, and I shook in every nerve and fibre of my frame. I pressed my hand to my forehead, held my eyes closed for a few moments, trying to collect my scattered senses: then I took up the miniature again, and examined it closely. Coralie looked over my arm, and considered the inscription with me. "'*June* 1*st*, 1834,'" she read; "that was the day of my birth; I was just eighteen this first of June. Eighteen thirty-four — that is precisely eighteen years ago."

"Great Heaven! this picture can't be *mine*, then!" I uttered; for the first time becoming aware of the import of the date. "Why, no! how should it? I was only two years of age when this was taken. Of course it is not mine — but whose is it, Coralie?"

"I do not know, monsieur," she answered. "So then, you are only two years my senior," she added; "I should

have thought you more than that; but gentlemen look more mature, earlier than we — it's the beard, I suppose."

I was steadily regarding the little portrait, as I turned it over and over in my hand. The face itself — and there was little more than just the head —was most exquisitely painted, and as fresh, apparently, as if completed yesterday ; and it was as much like that "intense," tropical, *boyish* face of the one I had taken for Sigismond, as a painting could be like a daguerreotype; except, perhaps, that this was a somewhat bolder face, with a dash of reckless daring in its expression. It was an exceedingly handsome face, nevertheless, (though I assert that it was like M. d'Herbelot,) and one that, having looked on once, you could not choose but look again. The casing which held it was of a peculiar red gold, with a raised wreath of forget-me-nots on the back, surrounding the inscription ; the small flowers in blue enamel. But what was more peculiar still, was the fact that it had the appearance of having been one half of a double locket, and also of having been wrenched off at the hinge from the other half: there was no handle or loop attached to it, but the catch which had fastened into the spring on the other side was entire. So strangely bewildered were my faculties, that it was some minutes before I found thought to lay down the picture and pick up the bit of folded paper which accompanied it, and which I had allowed to drop to the ground. I regained it as it lay at my feet, unfolded it, then read, and gazed upon it spell-bound — far more deeply mystified than before. It was the *half* only of a note; the paper a thick, glossy article, with an embossed border, and not very fresh in appearance. The yellow vellum sheet had been torn nearly straight down the middle, a part of both leaves remaining ; it was the right-hand side of the note, or letter ; and read thus :

"ed, my loved Coralie,
with full power to claim
! I give you a thousand,
believe the deep devotion
my whole soul is centred
my own one—soon, very soon.
me this evening.
ly evermore
Your HENRI."

There were *our* names, "Henri" and "Coralie!"—united names, telling that the persons who bore them were united in a wild and passionate love.

"In the name of Heaven, whose are these things, and where did you get them?" I exclaimed, when at length I found voice to speak.

Coralie was reading over the little paper again, and I noted the warm color creeping up into her hitherto pale, cold cheek, as she did so. She raised her eyes, and her blushes deepened to a rich damask rose, when she found my gaze centred upon her face. "They are *mine*," she said, in a low tone; "and I gained possession of them this very morning, from — well, from Madame Lesueur."

"Did you never have them in your possession before this morning?" I asked.

"Never," she replied. "And Madame, I presume, would have hesitated long before she would have given them to me at all. I took them — upon my own responsibility."

"Tell me all about it — *vite!*" And then a thought flashed over me: might not all this be some secret snare — some cunningly laid trap, which was to draw me into something dangerous — I knew not what? I remembered how Madame Lesueur had seemed to pierce me through and through with those steely eyes; then Marguerite had let fall some warning words about "stepping among adders;"

and now, Coralie's confusion and changing color — why was it? was it consciousness of duplicity toward me? a failing of her heart, unused to such deception? a fear of detection?

"Stop!" I cried, goaded by these stinging thoughts — and bursting at once into *medias res* with my usual impetuosity. "Why were you blushing just now, Coralie, while you were reading — and when I spoke to you?"

She crimsoned violently at this abrupt and unexpected question — her beautiful head drooped lower and lower upon her bosom. My heart sank within me: I would not for the world have proved her capable of duplicity. Yet I could but pity her overwhelming confusion.

"Coralie, *ma chère*," I said, kindly, taking up her small hand, which still held the paper, "will you tell me why you blushed while reading this? Was it from a consciousness that you are attempting to deceive me? that you —"

"*Deceive you?*" she interrupted, suddenly raising her eyes and fixing them upon me in startled astonishment, "*deceive you?* Monsieur d'Herbelot, I cannot understand you. If I blushed, it was from a consciousness that I — that I — Be assured, I never could deceive you. Because that I —" She stopped short, again covered with painful confusion, as she added impulsively, "I cannot say it!"

"Keep your secrets then, Coralie," I said, icily; "*I* do not seek to wrest them from you."

"You *do!*" she exclaimed, impetuously. "You do seek to wring them from me, and you are unkind to do so! This is 'man's love — half selfishness, half suspicion,' Marguerite says. You are angry now — angry, because I did not say that if I blushed 't was from a consciousness that thus *you* might have felt — might have written — But no;" and here she raised her head haughtily; her eyes flashed proudly upon me from their blue depths, and tears were glittering there, too. She added excitedly, "No — now I *will not* say it! Even *your* anger, sir, shall not

force me to it. A woman — even such as I — has a right to guard her own heart's secret!"

The blinding, dazzling truth flashed upon my *woman's* intuitions in that supreme moment! *Comme l'éclair* I saw that I had won; Coralie was mine!

I threw my arms around the superb young creature; I held her closely to my throbbing heart, and murmured, "Was it that you thought 't was thus I 'might have felt — have written' to *you, m'amie?* Ah! believe me, *your* thought was only the shadow — *mine* is the reality! I do thus feel for you — I could thus write; for, verily, my 'whole soul seems centred' in you. With your eyes looking full into mine, how could I have uttered the word 'deceive?' How could I have dreamed it?"

"How, indeed — of *me?*" she said, softly. "But, you are a man, and it was like men — as I know them," she added, with a sigh.

"*Hélas!*" and I echoed her sigh over the knowledge of men as *she* knew them, as all women do perhaps, who really know them at all. "Forgive me — forgive me, dearest Coralie! I cannot explain to you, now, the feelings which drove me to reproach you. A thousand times I ask — forgive me! And that I may be sure you do so, let me hear you say just once, '*I love you*' — only this once," I pleaded. But she did not say it audibly. Only her clear, smiling, and soul-full eyes said it, as she turned them full on mine, and laid her small, white hand within my own, frankly, and with a child's free glance of innocence and truth.

"For her eyes alone smiled constantly; her lips had serious sweetness,
And her front was calm — the dimple scarcely rippled on her cheek;
But her deep blue eyes smiled constantly, as if they had by fitness
Won the secret of a happy dream she did not care to speak."

A sense as of some new power swept over me — strange, strong, and subtle — glorious in its gladness, triumphant in its jubilant strength. My arms encircled her; her beautiful head drooped low upon my shoulder; her warm breath floated over my cheek; and, I will not deny it, that moment was the happiest of my life. Our lips met, and a wild joy thrilled through my whole being. I seemed made of fiery, throbbing pulses; the blood surged through my veins like glowing lava; the fulness and richness of her beauty flooded my soul with a powerful and passionate delight, while her soft, sunny-hearted, almost childlike love, brought tears of joy and gratitude to my eyes.

> "The glory of the noon on palaces
> Aglow with gems, was never half so bright
> As that pure feeling was, which sprang to life
> Within my soul, when first that radiant blaze
> Of love and beauty kindled it."

I will not say that in this intoxicating moment I did not forget Sigismond Sauvollée; that I did not desire, earnestly, passionately, almost fiercely, desire that I were no longer Henriette de Hauterive, but — Henri d'Herbelot! *I did* so desire — with the wildness of a deep delirium. If it was wrong — as perchance it was — may Heaven pardon me! But, had this been so, with what an exultant sense of power and self-reliance would I have drawn that radiant beauty to my heart, and bid defiance to fate! With what absorbing devotion would I have poured forth my whole heart's love for her acceptance! With what a triumphant scorn would I have met the world's cold eyes, and dared to place her, at once, in its highest and most exclusive circles! And then, the deep, strange ecstasy of knowing she was *mine* — mine ever, mine only; that Death himself could not separate us, but that in another and

more blissful world she would be mine — mine still, for time and for eternity. There has been no moment in my life like to that, so full of all we call the ineffable and unattainable, filling me, for the first time, with the idea of infinitude. I lived ages in that brief space. Centuries of common life pass over us while we "count time by heart-throbs."

> "Thrice-raptured moment! If all-blest like thee
> Are heaven's bright centuries, how brief will be
> Its countless ages of eternity!"

It passed — a meteor-dream of Paradise, that sank into darkness at my feet, and never, never came again! A fiery phantom-star which streamed across my sky, *just once* — then fell, to rise no more forever!

. . . . . .

"You do not ask me now about the picture?" said Coralie, in her sweet, low tones, as she lifted her head from my shoulder, where, I am sure, it had rested but for a moment. "Shall I not tell you how it came to be in my possession?" I bowed, merely; I had awakened from a dream of entranced delirium, and words had not yet come back to me.

"I will be brief, for there is really but little to say," she began, "concerning these things, which have so strangely puzzled and troubled us both. I went into Madame Lesueur's chamber last night, to make some inquiries about a dress which she was having trimmed for me. She was seated by her writing-table, as I entered, (I had not knocked at her door, for I am not required to do that when she is alone,) and seemed much engaged, for she did not notice my approach at all. The dress had been brought home, and was lying across a chair, very near her. I advanced to take it up, and in doing so, I must needs glance

over her shoulder, when I saw that she was gazing steadfastly upon this very picture. I was struck with the face in an instant, and thoughtlessly exclaimed aloud: '*Ouias! ma tante,* where did you get that picture of Monsieur d'Herbelot!' She sprang from her chair, and faced me for a moment with an angry glare in her eyes; and then she said, very coldly, 'What brings *you* here, Coralie?'

"'I came in to see my dress, aunt, and you did not notice me,' I replied. 'Won't you tell me where you got the picture?'

"'No, child,' she said; and then she looked at it again, and added, 'So you think this resembles Monsieur d'Herbelot?'

"'I do, indeed; I am sure it was taken for him,' I replied.

"'You are very greatly mistaken, then: it was *not* "taken for him,"' she answered. 'But I am glad you think there is a likeness; I was very much struck with the resemblance the first time he called here. I watched him narrowly, and the impression increased upon me.'

"'But, if it is not Monsieur d'Herbelot, *who is it,* Aunt Elise?' I questioned. 'Your husband? one of your lovers of long ago? Who is it?' I was growing importunate.

"'I don't know. No matter who it is, or was, Coralie,' she said, hastily. 'Give it to me, and try on your dress: the woman is waiting down stairs. I am hurried, too — have some accounts to cast up, and some letters to finish, as I am going across the lake to-morrow, to be gone two or three days. Make haste, now.' And not another word could I elicit from her upon the subject. I took up the dress and went forward to the large mirror opposite; and *in it* I saw my aunt take up the picture, and this paper, touch a spring on the left side of her writing-table; a narrow leaf fell; she pushed the articles in quickly, and

closed it again. I was busying myself with my dress — she did not know that I observed her. What more is to be said? This morning my aunt did go across the lake. I felt an irresistible desire to see that picture; I did not mean to take it away, then —" Here Coralie paused, and quick flushes again dyed her pure brow. I understood her — she merely wished to look again upon a picture which was so like myself. "*Tout va bien! En avant,*" I said, smiling. I scarcely dare say now how much this implied confession gratified me. "Yes, to go on," she resumed. "After considerable time and patience had been expended, I found the secret spring; and have brought these strange things to you, that you might see them, and help me think out what they mean. They *belong to me,* I am confident, from the name Coralie, (aunt's name is Elise,) and I imagine they concern you, also — but how they belong to me, or may affect you, I cannot tell. What do *you* think, Henri?"

"*Dieu du ciel!* I am not able to think at all, now," I answered. "But, then, I *must* think — I must unravel this mystery, and *I will.* Trust me, Coralie. I swear to do it, *Dieu aidant!* Return these articles to their hiding-place for the present. That they are in some way connected with us both, I do not doubt, and I thank you for bringing them to me. When will Madame Lesueur return?"

"On the day after to-morrow."

"Two days, almost three, to wait; how can I do it?" I exclaimed. "But, I must think — yes, I must have time to think. I cannot now see an inch before me. Still, I swear to you, my Coralie, thus kneeling before a just Heaven, that I will see you through this maze and mystery; and if there has been (as I suspect) foul play *some where,* woe be to those on whom rests the guilty chronicle! I swear to see you righted, Coralie — swear it even thus."

And kneeling by her side, with my arms encircling her graceful waist, I drew her gently down, and sealed my oath upon the pure tablet of her brow.

"Hasten! hasten, mademoiselle — for heaven's sake wake up, and come quickly!" exclaimed a low voice near us; and in a moment more Marguerite threw aside the foliage, and seizing Coralie by the arm, was hurrying her away.

"Stop! hold! what mean you, madame?" I cried, endeavoring to detain them.

"Adieu, señor; for all the saints' sakes, remain where you are for at least a quarter of an hour," said Marguerite, hurriedly. "Come, Coralie, I've been watching the gates, and *he's here.* Remain, señor, I conjure you — *you are watched!*" and she glided away with Coralie, who sighed "Addio," as her paling cheek told of some new fear or horror crowding upon her young spirit — and both were gone.

In ten minutes I ventured cautiously forth, and saw them passing the gate opposite the Cathedral in company with a gentleman; but they were at such a distance, and the twilight gathering down about us, so that it was in vain I strained my eyes forward; I could not distinguish the person, if indeed I knew him at all. And so, with a new pain at my heart, through the deepening dusk I hastened homeward.

CHAPTER VIII.

COMPLETELY MYSTIFIED.

Closer and lower, gathering round me deeper
  The universal cloud;
I feel like some wild, horror-stricken sleeper
  Who wakens in a shroud!
Like some poor wretch who closed his eyes at morning
  Against the growing day,
And finds himself, without a prayer or warning,
  A tenant of the clay!

Around me is a darkness omnipresent,
  With boundless horror grim,
Descending from the zenith, ever crescent
  To the horizon's rim:
The golden stars, all charred and blackened by it,
  Are swept out one by one;
My world is left, as if at Joshua's fiat,
  A moonless Ajalon!

JOSEPH BRENNAN.

ALL night long I lay turning over and over again in my mind the incidents of my interview with Mademoiselle Lesueur, at the Place d'Armes. Remembrance effectually "murdered sleep." After the first shock and its consequent bewilderment passed, my head seemed still dizzied and my heart drunken with its strange experiences. I strove to analyze my feelings, to "define my position" calmly and dispassionately; but the more I struggled after light to lead me, the thicker grew the Egyptian gloom around. That there was a path of duty *somewhere*, threading away out into these regions of mystery, I was con-

vinced; but where? And how was I to find it? and when found, how to follow it? "Let the light enter!" I cried in my despair, with the dying Goethe; but no light came, and my soul, like his, went out amid the thick shadows of the unknown Future; striving ever to grasp

> "God's right hand in that darkness,
> And be lifted up, and strengthened;"

and striving, alas! in vain. How poor, how feeble, how *human* I felt myself to be! There was nothing in me to send forth the God-like fiat, "Let there be light!" about my labyrinthine way. Worn and weary, I must wander on alone upon a "hidden path," in patience, waiting for the day to dawn upon my benighted course; or I must gather courage from some dread *necessity*, and struggle onward through the maze — waging hand-to-hand war with "Circumstances — the unspiritual god that turns our hopes to ashes" — and all the while

> ". . . with such rash
> And passionate cuttings at the Gordian knot
> That tangled up my heart-strings,"

as makes the brain of woman reel with suffering, and her soul tremble with a deadly fear. To sit and *wait* — wait for the clouds to lift, and my way open before me of *itself*, was not in consonance with my impetuous and passionate nature. I was a sword to be broken or blunted in the battle, not to moulder away with rust in the scabbard. To set forward then at once, even on a blind path, or to carve out from the chaos which encompassed me a way to the accomplishment of my design; was my choice. I was not unaware that it might bring me to sorrow and suffering — to shame, perhaps, direst of all! Yet I had "put my foot upon the ploughshare, and I could not go back.

It might be burning hot; it might sear and scar the tender feet; but I had set my face forward, and the ordeal must be passed. Not calmly, nor dispassionately, but just with whatever of spirit, strength, and courage I could command, (and which, I fear, was not very great,) I surveyed my situation and surroundings. As I lay there upon a sleepless couch, staring with wide-open eyes into the darkness, I tried to gather up the tangled threads of this crimson life-skein which were winding around me; to loosen this, to unravel that, and follow up a third until it mingled with the woof of my past, or future: all in vain. I saw myself, the daughter of a noble house, going down upon a path of danger and dread; perchance worse — of sorrow and shame. What if the world (as Sigismond had said) were to become cognizant of the fact? How would the sharpened tongues of the "dear five hundred friends" strike, like poisoned javelins, into the proud spirit which erst had "ruled them with a rod of iron!" I tried myself resolutely and pitilessly; I wished to prove to myself whether I was gold or dross. I questioned myself keenly, and found that when I remembered Coralie calling to me from the wilderness in which she wandered now alone — undefended, sin-surrounded, tempted perhaps — I felt that for her I could brave the world, could bear its bitterness, could even dare more, for the sweet hope of bringing her home, at last, into the "pleasant pastures" and beside the "still waters" of purity and peace.

I went over our interview, little by little, pausing to analyze myself, ever and anon. I contrasted my feelings when Sigismond bade me farewell — when I was *all the woman* — with the strange delirium which lifted me completely out of myself when I discovered that Coralie loved me, *as a man*. "Very unnatural," some caviller will say, "not lifelike, not womanly." There we differ. Not like

every-day life, perhaps, nor "natural" to ordinary women. But this was not an every-day experience, nor am I, it is to be hoped, (in all modesty be it spoken,) an ordinary woman. On the contrary, I am, in many respects, exceptional. Sigismond Sauvollée and myself were admirably well adapted to each other. He had the strong, calm brain of a man with the gentle heart of a woman. My nature was twofold also — the brain of a woman, and a certain masculine element in me also, which I can find no better name for than to call it a virile heart-force. How I came by it — who can tell? God gave it to me with my life, I suppose, and for a purpose. May I be excused if I intimate my belief that this twofold nature gives to the world its best women and its noblest men? I loved Sigismond wholly, and solely, as I would a gift direct from God. My single (apparent) inconstancy to him was on this evening, when, overshadowed by beauty and surrendering myself to the enchantment of its loveliness, longing eagerly to gather that beauty to myself and lift it free of all its sorrowful surroundings, I had deliriously desired to *be* what I *seemed*, the boy-lover of Coralie Lesueur. To me the wish appears neither unnatural nor unwomanly, because I really felt it. The sunsets which we sometimes see *in nature* would, if placed upon canvas, appear unnatural. The critics would say so. I do not know, however, that this would materially damage the sunsets. I am, like them, content to be "unnatural" semi-occasionally, if I only can be *true to nature!*

I justify myself, and *she* justifies me now; but, on this night of which I speak, a deep pang, that was half exultant joy and half sorrowful remorse, thrilled through me as I remembered that *I* had won her young heart's "first and passionate love." But *how* had I won it? God forgive

me! I could not help even then recurring with delight to that charmed moment when

> "She did confess it. Like a cloudy veil
> That in the twilight opes above a star
> Her lashes rose: she looked into mine eyes
> And said it thus. . . .
> . . . I heard his low-voiced vows
> Soft as the river's rippling surge that sways
> Around the willow-boughs; and she replied
> With that same kiss the willow gives the wave."

Alone with my own soul and the darkness; yet the blood rushed in a tumultuous torrent to my brow, as I remembered that brief draught of an intoxicating madness which I had drained, when, a few hours before, I had clasped her to my bosom, and forgotten, as in some weird, exhilarating *hasheesh* dream — everything in earth or heaven, save that she was mine! And now — how was all this to end? how could I ever acknowledge the deception I had practised? I who had dared to tax *her* with duplicity — how confess that I was a deceiver? how should I dare now to drop the mask of the adoring lover, and stand forth simply — the "female friend?" Would she not despise me? and could I blame her if she did? Would she not sigh to relinquish the manly lover and accept the woman friend; for is not *love* of greater worth than *friendship?* A man will not accept in lieu of the love of the woman he worships, the affection of the best brother the world ever saw; a woman forgets filial and fraternal love in that of her husband; why then should she not reject me, who had nothing better to offer her than the devotion of a friend? It was a torture to me — this knowledge of the confession I had to make, and the thought that it *must be made.* Sooner or later the dreaded *dênoûment* must come — *how*, I did not even dare to dream. It was a thought that racked my mind

until it felt shattered — "broken on the wheel" of strong mental pain. I could not look it directly in the face — so I cast it from me for the time with sore impatience, as another perplexity took possession of my brain.

That broken picture! That mutilated letter! *Au nom de Dieu*, whence came they? whose were they — and what were they? and why came they thus *to me?* I went over it all again and again. "Henri" and "Coralie," these were the names; "Henri" *to* Coralie," that was the relation; and love — strong, impetuous, exclusive love; full of a deep earnestness, and "rich with passion's burning wine" — that was the link which bound them! "June 1st, 1834." The day of *my* Coralie's birth; the day on which I completed my second year; the day of my mother's death. And now — eighteen years after — that picture and that fragment of a letter come up to us — and why? Is it an accident? Or is there a reason and a destiny in it? Is there indeed near us

> ". . . a divinity that shapes our ends,
> Rough-hew them as we may"?

In dwelling upon this point, I seemed to have a vague presentiment that some dread, and perchance "*dead* secret," was before me. There was a knot to be unravelled, which I alone could loose; a labyrinth to be threaded, where I alone could find the clue; a secret portal to be opened, of which I alone could possess the "Open Sesame." But what that cabalistic word might be — when it was to be spoken, or where, I had now no means of determining. Time — and time only, could reveal it to me.

And anon another "change came o'er the spirit of my dream:" a new perplexity, another mystery. What could Marguerite have meant by her hints concerning a path "among adders"? what by her hurried exclamation,

"*You are watched, sir*"? Who could know of my adventure? Was it possible that any one could have penetrated my disguise? Who could it be that dared to play the spy upon my actions? Had Ninette — but no — I could not wrong this faithful creature by such a thought. And more — who was the man I saw in company with Marguerite and Coralie as they left the Place d'Armes — of whom the former had whispered "*He's* here"? Verily I was in a maze of difficulties. I stood in a dark labyrinth, surrounded by a guard of Sphynxine riddles, any one of which might daunt a woman's heart to solve. And yet they must not only be met, but passed; they must not only be studied, but explained. Who was to do it? Drearily enough my heart answered, out of the shadows — "Myself — no one but myself." Oh that the bright, fair morning of Sigismond's return were come! Ten days! Ten whole, almost life-long days, and not one of them yet gone! How should I bear this suspense? It was just ten times as much as my impetuous spirit could patiently endure. Let me think. Until the return of Madame Lesueur, I *must* wait. There was but one little item made plain to me: I knew now why she had regarded me so closely: because of my resemblance to that broken picture. What was the original to *her*? What to Coralie — what to me? She had said she did not know who was the original of that picture. That was simply a falsehood. I would wring the truth from her — the truth I would have, even if blood were the price. Excited beyond bounds, I sprang from the bed, and paced the dark chamber rapidly to and fro; repeating, "Till she comes I *must* wait; and then — and *then* —"

And thus the morning found me. A faint gray was just breaking in the east, and Ninette still slept soundly. I had paused in my hurried walk to throw open one of the

venetians which opened upon the balcony, when I heard a step and a low knock at my chamber door. Thomas stood there when I opened it. There was much of sorrow in his bronzed face as he said, "If you please, mistus — will you come in soon to see master?"

"Is he ill — worse, I mean?" I asked, breathlessly.

"Yes, Miss; master is n't well, mistus — not well at all. He slept none last night; and he talked about you, but would n't let me come to tell you he wanted you, until it was your time of waking. 'Let her sleep,' he says; 'let her sleep as God allows the young and innocent to sleep.' But it 's morning now, Miss, or nigh on to it; and as I slipped by your room I heard you a-stirring — so I thought I 'd tell you. He did n't tell me to come. But if I might have a say, Miss, would n't it be best to send for a physician?" and the good old servant, having delivered himself of his "say," stood again on his dignity, awaiting mine.

"Has your master spoken of any one in particular?" I inquired.

"Lord bless you, no, mistus," he replied. "Master won't allow as he is sick: says he 's only weak like, an' don't want any doctor at all. But he don't sleep any of consequence, Miss — only after taking his drops, and that 's not good, nateral sleep, neither. He moans in his sleep then, and says, over an' over; 'Pauline! Pauline!' — a-calling your dead mother, Miss, you know."

"I will go to him directly, Thomas," I said; "my poor father! If there be a necessity, we must persuade him into calling in medical assistance."

"Jest so, mistus; my own judgment precisely," assented the servitor. "An' if I might say a word, Miss, I 'd recommen' Mas' Sigismond's friend, young Dr. Dupont. He 's mighty pleasant, an' a fine-lookin', honest gentleman; an' as to doctorin' — why, they *do* say, Miss,

that Dr. Dupont's been furder, an' fotch back more, than enny of 'em!"

"Very well, Thomas," I replied, smiling in spite of myself at his odd manner of lauding the medical attainments of my friend Eugene, "we will decide upon that very soon. Go back now to my father; do not mention that you have said anything to me; I will be there in a few moments."

Ninette was still asleep, curled up on her low lounge in my dressing-room; and I did not awaken her. Passing in softly, I bathed my face—a little of the ice, still remaining unmelted in the urn, I took to cool my dry lips and feverish brow: then, smoothing the thick waves of my hair and throwing on a light *robe de chambre*, I went back through my own room and the long hall, to my father's apartments. A wide gallery ran around three sides of the house, and at the east corner my father's sleeping-chamber opened out upon this gallery, by glass doors and venetians. I passed round to that point, expecting to find those doors open—as was his custom during the summer. The air was fresh and balmy, (for we did not live exactly in the great seething, sweltering heart of the city,) and a mocking-bird, swaying himself on the pendent spray of a vine which had clambered up round column and balustrade from the gallery below, sent forth upon the morning breeze a perfect shower of trills and cadenzas. Both doors were wide open, and when I came opposite them I saw my father lying upon his bed, which occupied the centre of the room, and looking out from it upon the eastern sky. He started slightly as I appeared; then smiled, and held out his hand. I went softly in to his bedside.

"Why, what a very lark you are, my child!" he said, kindly. "I was thinking of sending for you an hour or two hence. But, sit down by me. Thomas!"—as he said this, he glanced toward a small table near him, on which

stood some vials, and a glass goblet half-filled with a light-brown liquid—"Thomas, remove that table, and set a chair in its place: do you not see that your mistress is standing?" Thomas did as he was ordered; and I noticed that he carried away the vials and goblet altogether. "The 'drops,' I suppose," I said to myself.

"You look at me as though you thought I was an older man than you had heretofore imagined," said my father, with a faint smile, as I sat regarding him with painful interest. "But you must remember that this cold gray light of early morning is unfavorable to us all. Even you, I think, do not look so fresh and blooming as usual: not enough so for a young lady who has slept sweetly all through the summer night. Depend upon it this cool glare of early morning is not a human beautifier." He spoke playfully, but I was too sad to return his smile.

"Pardon me, sir," I said, taking up his hand, which was thin and tremulous; "I am not thinking that you seem an older man, but that you are not so well as I anticipated. I fear that I have been remiss in not reminding you more seriously that you need to see Dr. Dupont." As I said this, I looked at the changed face before me, and sighed. I had not thought it possible that any one could be so altered, in so short a space of time, unless by a severe illness; and my father still maintained, firmly, that he was "*not* ill"—it was only a trifling weakness and unrest, that would soon pass away by keeping cool and quiet, and with a little horseback exercise in the pleasant evenings. But I noticed that for three days past he had not taken that exercise; indeed, I felt that he was now no longer able to do so. His strength was not equal to the management of his horse, though he would fain have made me believe otherwise. His rides were always solitary; and to go out for a drive, with an attendant, was a thing I had never

known him to do. His brow was haggard and furrowed; the eyes looked sunken, from the purple circles which surrounded them; his complexion was dull and dead; and then his limbs trembled nervously, and there was a weariness and languor about all his movements which betokened illness. It pained me greatly. I felt assured that he was much worse, and again entreated him to allow me to call in Eugene, if only that I might have his assurance that there was nothing serious the matter.

"And so you are not willing to take my word for it! Surely, when the patient himself declares that he is not ill, every one ought to be satisfied. I don't want to see Dupont, or any one else, my child, save yourself. You shall nurse me well again in a few days — will you not?" said my father, taking up my hand as if to detain me, when the bell rang for breakfast.

"I shall only be too happy to be allowed the privilege of nursing you, my dear father," I replied, quite moved by his kindness. "But, since M. Sauvollée is absent, and will be so for days to come, I would be gratified if you could agree to allow Eugene Dupont to assist me. He is our friend, and in every way so trustworthy."

My father looked at me steadily for a moment. "Not now, not now; when I need medical advice I will seek it," he said, hastily. As I thought he was annoyed by my importunities, I desisted from further persuasion, although I was confident he needed a physician, and that urgently, too.

"Shall I come and read to you, sir, after I have sent up your breakfast?" I asked, as I turned to go.

"No; come and talk to me," he replied. "I love the full, soft tones of your voice, Henriette; and to look at you when you are speaking. Ah! by-the-by — Thomas, give your mistress that little packet of bills, etc., which I put

up for her before Monsieur Sauvollée left. This is it, child —five hundred in notes, and some gold; you said, I think, you had still some little purchases to make before setting out on your bridal journey next month. Have all those affairs in readiness: if you should want more, you have only to say so."

"Oh! I do not need this—I am quite ready," I said, hastily. And this was truth. The first of June was to have been my wedding-day, and my *trousseau*, both elegant and abundant, had been sent in by the *modistes* fully three weeks ago. I wanted nothing more; besides, I was not at all in a mood to be thinking over happy bridal arrangements, just then.

"Ah! well, *n'importe*," answered my father. "Do as you please with it; young ladies can always find a use for bank notes—if it should only be to light their cigarettes." He said this playfully, and smiling; then, suddenly, all the light went out of his face, his eyes fell upon the thin clasped hands, and he added, "*You* are all I have left in the world. Now go—and come again whenever you can." I obeyed, and, after breakfast, returned, and sat by his side until near the dinner hour.

CHAPTER IX.

IN THE OLD CATHEDRAL.

Innocent —
Let the night be ne'er so dark,
The moon is surely *somewhere* in the sky;
So surely is your whiteness to be found
Through all dark facts. . . .
. . . . . The poor lip
Just motioned for a smile — then let it go;
And then, with scarce a stirring of the mouth,
As if a statue spoke that could not breathe,
But spoke on calm, between its marble lips —
'I 'm glad — I 'm very glad you clear me so!'

MRS. BROWNING.

WHY have you been making yourself look so smart, Ninette? where are you going this evening?" I inquired, as my trim maid, in snowy muslin and broad pink ribbons, came into my dressing-room.

"To vespers, if you please, mistress."

"Oh! very well: certainly, Ninon."

One long, long week had passed, and it was the holy Day of rest. What a week of impatient durance it had been to me! With what feverish anxiety I had counted the hours until Madame Lesueur should return! — determined, when she came, to go directly to her, and demand some explanation of that broken picture and letter. Ah! yes, I would wring those secrets from her; I would force her into confession. And then, when Wednesday came — when I knew she had returned — how did my boasted

courage, my stern determination fade and fail me! I remembered all that I had feared and suffered in going to that house, even with Sigismond by my side: how could I venture there again — *alone?* Oh! coward heart of mine! I shrank from the attempt, and for the present waited, (*waiting* is a woman's life-business, is it not?) counting the days and hours until Sigismond should come. Twice during the week I had received a love-missive; twice I had written brief letters, urging his speedy return, yet not explaining why I so greatly desired it. How could I describe the strange incidents of the Place d'Armes, in a letter? My father's health had served in some degree to distract my attention from the subject of Coralie, her antecedents and surroundings; and I had spent much of the time by his bedside, reading to him, singing for him, or conversing with him. He was, I feared, rapidly declining; yet he would not allow me to say so. On Saturday morning I sent privately for Dr. Dupont, and made him acquainted, to the best of my ability, with the circumstances and progress of my father's malady.

"He ought to leave the city, mademoiselle," said the doctor, after considering the case. "Do all in your power to cheer and amuse him until M. Sauvollée returns, and then I think we can manage to induce him to go to Biloxi, or the Pass. Were his strength sufficient, I should insist upon you all leaving this city for the far North — neither should I allow you to return until you could send forward the white frost as your *avant-coureur.* You too, my dear friend, need a change of air; your cheek is losing its freshness; I fear you are confining yourself too closely to your father's room; you must be careful of yourself — there is much depending on you. Be sure, above all things, to keep up your spirits, and get all the sleep you can. Just so soon as Sauvollée arrives I must send you

out of town. It is absolutely necessary — and I wish heartily that it could be done to-morrow."

No — I did not wish that — I could not leave town to-morrow. Little did Eugene Dupont dream of *all* that was "depending on me," when he urged me to be careful of myself. But I *felt it.* On this the quiet Sabbath I had remained at home, in attendance upon my father most of the day. In ministering to his comfort, and using all efforts to amuse and inspirit him, I had been crushing down that anxiety and impatience in regard to Coralie, which would otherwise have rendered me wretched. I had, in a casual way, and as if it were a sudden idea of my own, mentioned the project of leaving town, and my father caught at the suggestion with avidity.

"Certainly, my child; thank you — why did we not think of this before?" he exclaimed, with more animation than I had seen him evince for days. "Yes, yes, that will be the very best for us all. I shall be quite able, by the time Sigismond returns, to go to the Pass — indeed, to go anywhere with you. Talking all this while of physicians, when I have a better one here at home! But why did you not strike upon this idea before, my daughter? Ah! well, now that it *is* thought of, we will act upon it. I would that Sauvollée could arrive to-day."

Helas! and how did my aching heart re-echo that desire! If he were only come! In the afternoon, having read my father to sleep, I threw myself down upon the sofa in my dressing-room to "think it all over" again. Exhausted, I fell asleep. My slumber was brief — only a few minutes, it seemed to me — for, when I woke, the self-same thoughts were seething in my busy brain. How I kept turning them over and over again, and to so little purpose! Now, a new impulse was added to urge me forward in unravelling, if possible, the mystery which that

picture had hung round Coralie. In a few days, at farthest, we must prepare to leave the city, to be absent, perhaps, three or four months; in the mean time, what was to become of my lovely *protégée?* I shuddered as I asked myself the question — answer it I did not dare to do, even in thought. I put it away from me hurriedly, as I murmured to myself, "I will not think of it; before that time she must be beyond the reach of danger; she *must* — she *shall* — so help me Heaven!"

It was at that moment Ninette entered, and I noticed her holiday attire. "Shall I not dress your hair, mistress, and lay out some fresh muslins for you, before I go? or are you too tired to dress?" asked the girl, as she poured out water and arranged some flowers on the dressing-table.

"You may brush my hair, just a little while; I will not detain you long. My head aches; I can't dress just now," I said, languidly.

"Do you know, mistress, that I sometimes see your — your pretty lady at vespers?" asked Ninon, timidly, as she passed the brush softly over my head, which lay upon the arm of the sofa.

"Who? What are you talking about, *petite?*"

"About the pretty lady you go to see when — when you're a *gentleman*, mademoiselle," she answered, naively. "*Ma foi!* how sweet she is! The angels that hang up in the church are not half as much like they come from *le bon Dieu* as she is."

I had started up. "Is it Coralie? Does she come to vespers, Ninon?"

"Very often, mademoiselle. And I do love to look at her, when the music is playing so grand, for her face is good as an Ave Mary that is going right up into heaven. I'm sure the good angels carry *her* prayers up to God first, always."

"That is, if she prays at all, Ninon," I said, doubtfully, wishing to hear what she would say.

"Oh, yes, mistress; she *do* pray," answered the girl, earnestly. "I can see it in her soft eyes — and sometimes they are full of tears, too."

"Did you go to the church last Monday evening?"

"*Oui*, mademoiselle; that was a special occasion."

"Did you see her then?" I asked, hastily.

"Yes — but not in the church," was the reply. "You see, Miss, after you left home with Mas' Sigismond, I went to vespers, as you always allow me. I did not see her there at all; but after service was over, Marie Devreux, and Jacques, her brother — you know, mademoiselle."

"Yes, yes; I know — your sweetheart; get on with your story, Ninon."

"With mademoiselle's permission. As I was saying, they wanted me to take a turn in the Square; but I said 't was getting late, and time all 'spectable colored folks to be home at their own firesides, (only we have n't any in this hot weather;) and just then, while we were discussin' the propriety, we stopped at the gate — and who should come out of it right there but the sweet, pretty lady you goes to see; and the other fine young woman that always goes with her; and the gentleman that was gallanting them was — you could n't think *who*, mistress."

"Well, tell me, *vitement!*" I cried, breathlessly.

"Why, just *your* old beau! Him that you despised so, Miss — Monsieur Berthêl," answered she.

"Jules Berthêl! *nom de Dieu!* then it is *he* that —" that is "watching me," I had almost said; but I checked myself just in time. Berthêl, indeed! and so it was he of whom Marguerite had spoken when she said, in that half-frightened way, "*He's here.*" Well, that was something gained: I *knew* my enemy.

"Yes, Miss," continued Ninette, "it was just M. Berthêl. I am sure I know him—he used to come here often enough. But he looks different now, too. So I did not go into the Square, mistress; I hurried along home, and reached here some minutes before you."

As my maid chattered on, an impulse came upon me—I, too, would go to vespers. My father would not need me, and I would be at home again before dark. Oh! I longed to see Coralie's sweet eyes—to speak, if only a word—to tell her she was not forgotten.

"Lay out my dress, Ninon; I am going to the Cathedral," I exclaimed, springing from the sofa, and beginning to toss up my hair *en cavalier*.

"Which dress, if you please, mistress? Is it the grenadine robe, or the flounced organdie, or the —" And how far she would have run on with the inventory of my summer wardrobe there is no telling, had I not put a period to it at once with, "My *citizen's dress*, please."

"Mademoiselle is not going to wear *that!*" uttered the girl, her wide-open eyes growing wider every moment.

"*Oui*," was the reply; and the costume was brought. Very quickly I put it on. Opening the top drawer of the dressing-table to get my watch, I saw my little pistol lying beside it; and, near by, the roll of bills and gold which my father had given me, and which I had put into a common leathern case. Scarce knowing why I did so, I slipped both the money and pistol into my side-pocket; and, accompanied by Ninette, went down the back staircase and out through the garden—the same mode of exit I had taken on the morning I met Sigismond at the "Date Tree," on our way to Carrollton. "Stay, Ninette," I said, as she paused to unlock the gate at the back of the garden—"wait one moment. I do not wish to expose myself, unnecessarily, to public gaze; I do not know whether or not

I shall be able to bear it alone; so, do you go on, enter the church, and see if Coralie is there. If she is, and *alone*, as you come out take off this flaunting sash;" and I lifted the ribbon with the slender cane I carried in my hand. "Now hasten, Ninon; service is half over by this time. Don't omit the signal. I shall be somewhere near, and certain to see you." And the maid quickly disappeared.

I sauntered on slowly, and coming at last to the Cathedral, found scarcely any one outside, save the coachmen belonging to a long line of vehicles drawn up along the edge of the sidewalk. "Have a hack, sah?" inquired a smiling, ebony-faced personage, as I turned away from the door and faced the carriages — rather uncertain what to do next. "Ah! yes, my good fellow, I will take a seat in yours, for a short while; remain precisely where you are. Is the service almost over?" and I laid some silver in the man's hand and sprang into the carriage.

"Pooty near over, sah — 'bout half an hour, sah," answered the driver, closing the door.

"Very well. Remember, I wish to remain just here until service is over and the people disperse," I said. It then occurred to me that, if Coralie was not at vespers, I was quite safely ensconced, and could be driven home — or very nearly so — without any exposure whatever. The minutes passed. To wile away the time, which, short as it was, seemed an eternity to wait, I pulled up the blinds and looked from behind them into the Square beyond. Groups of people were there, passing to and fro; and I had not been regarding them five minutes, when, coming up a sidewalk toward the gate, I saw Marguerite, and with her the stranger whom I had seen once before, on the "Shell Road," riding with Coralie and Jules Berthêl. Of course, they could not see me. They came to the gate, paused a

few moments — looking in the direction of the church — then turned, and walked slowly back as they came. Evidently they were looking for some one — Coralie, most probably — and I inferred from this that she was now within the Cathedral. But was she alone? I should see very soon. The closing chant died away; there was a hum and a rush within the church, and out poured the worshippers in a gorgeous, living stream. From my friendly ambuscade, I strained my eyes forward: Coralie was nowhere to be seen. The crowd ebbed away; vehicles rattled off; the sidewalk was almost deserted, and I was beginning to think I had missed Ninon in the mass of people — when suddenly she appeared; and, as I realized instantly, *without* her bright-colored sash. I sprang out; and, as I passed her at the entrance, she whispered, "Up stairs." On I dashed, very nearly upsetting the old organist, who was coming down. I gained the centre of the gallery. There were many penitents below, kneeling among the pews and pillars, some at the altar's foot, some before the Madonna; but there was only one figure in the gallery, and that knelt humbly in an obscure corner. The face was turned away from me; but every curve of that graceful form, in its humility, said, as with an audible voice, "*Lord, be merciful to me — a sinner!*" She seemed engaged in earnest prayer, and, from the corner where she knelt, her eyes were cast down toward a sculptured figure of the Madonna, which graced the altar-piece. After a few minutes, she rose, gathered up the rich lace mantle which fell like a cloud over her robes of snow, and "turned, in act to go." Her face was now full toward me. It was exceedingly pale — white, almost, as the robes she wore. A moment, and she perceived me, as I stood awaiting her. A faint flush and a lovely half-smile lighted up the statue-like features as she came for-

ward, modestly, and gave me her hand. I pressed a kiss upon it; and gently drawing her to a seat just in front of the organ, took my place by her side. For a few moments we looked down upon the magnificent altar-piece, with its sculptured marbles, its wrought drapery, its massive vases of rarest flowers, and upon the kneeling votaries below — ourselves screened from observation by the carved railing in front of us. The tall waxen tapers were all extinguished, and profound silence reigned through the vast edifice — except, now and then, as the soft footfall of some priestly father fell upon the echoing aisle, or, as pausing ever and anon among the penitents, he would raise his eyes to the Madonna and murmur, in deep and solemn tones, "*Sanctissima! ora pro nobis!*"

"It never occurred to me that you were a Catholic, *ma chère*," I said at length, in a low half-whisper.

"Nor am I," she returned, in the same undertone; "I am nothing — but a waif. I was educated at the Sacred Heart, you remember, but I do not dare call myself a Christian of any creed."

"But you come here often? you like to come?"

"Yes, I come here to pray, or rather to implore the blessed Madonna to pray for me. I used to do so at the convent when I felt lost and lonely, as I frequently did. I do not think I know how to pray yet, for myself — mothers teach their children these things; but I have had no mother — simply a waif, you know."

I thought I could divine the beautiful child-like feeling in her heart; so I said, "And you can regard the Virgin as *a mother* — teaching you to pray, and praying with and for you — is it not so, dear Coralie?"

Enthusiasm glowed upon the bright face as she answered, low and eagerly, "Yes! that is it. The Madonna is *a woman* — a *mother;* I love her — she becomes between me

and the great God and Father of all; whom, were it not for her, I should fear."

"But, *m'amie*," I said, touched to the heart by the sincere pathos of her words, "can you not recognize in Jesus, the son of Mary, our great Intercessor? and can you not see in God, the Father — *our* Father, full of mercy and love, and whose 'loving-kindnesses are over all his works'?"

"I cannot see it so yet," she replied. "I have not been taught as you have, and I am afraid. I cling to the blessed Spirit-Mother which yonder pure marble represents; and if I could only be in truth her spiritual child, she would with a mother's love gather up the broken sentences and troubled thoughts which I mean for prayers, and present them acceptably to the Saviour and the Father."

I felt that it would be a cruel wrong for me to combat this feeling of the lonely child-heart before me. It was reaching out, eagerly and earnestly, after the maternal element — a feeling so strong in the motherless; so natural to us all, when we are weary and worn — that lonely, lonely cry —

> "Tired of the hollow, the base, the untrue,
> Mother! oh, mother! my heart calls for you —
> Never hereafter to wake or to weep —
> Rock me to sleep, mother — rock me to sleep."

"Coralie," I whispered, abruptly changing the topic, "I have so longed to see you! Have you discovered anything further regarding the — that picture?"

She shook her head; then said, "Twice I have endeavored to draw my aunt into conversation concerning it; but she will not permit me to question her. I have bewildered myself over it until I fear my brain is turned."

"And mine also," I replied. "So it was Monsieur Berthêl who carried you off from the Square last Monday evening.

His appearance seemed to frighten you, and also to flutter the self-poised Marguerite a little. Why was this, *ma chère?*"

"You saw him, then! how rash in you to expose yourself so!" she exclaimed. "Yes, it was Monsieur Berthêl."

"And why is he 'watching' *me?*"

"Because you have come to visit me — and —" she blushed, and hesitated. "Because he —"

"In short — because I love you, and he dares do the same — cowardly villain that he is!" I uttered. She bowed her head, and a deep blush dyed the pure brow and cheek, even casting its flush down upon the throat of snow.

"I rather fear Monsieur Berthêl," she said, after a short pause. "And I dislike, even more than I fear him. Intuitively, I feel that he is a bad man; and yet he possesses a great influence over my aunt. I cannot divine the reason of this — she is a strong, sometimes stern woman, yet she appears to fear Monsieur Berthêl."

"Is it so?" I muttered, half to myself; "then I must find out *why*. Does Berthêl —" But I checked the cruel question — it would be an insolence; I could not say the insulting words, "Does Berthêl seek you as his *wife?*" I would not wound her by any questions as to his designs: let her believe I thought them honorable. This was not my opinion, of course; but I only said, "Loved by such a reckless, dissolute, and wholly unprincipled man as I know Jules Berthêl to be — I tremble for you, Coralie. I must get you away, somehow."

"Alas! you know not how I tremble for myself!" she uttered, passionately. "I am environed by dangers — a thousand difficulties beset me — at times I am half-bewildered by surrounding terrors — yet I see no loop-hole of escape."

"Will you not come *with me*, Coralie?" I whispered. "I

have neither mother nor sister. Come with me, and I will protect you — love you — *save* you;" and as my arms encircled her I looked into her eyes, awaiting her reply. For one moment she seemed the bright embodiment of love and joy; glad tears sprang into her soft luminous eyes, blushes bloomed in her lately pallid cheeks; yet it was but a moment. Suddenly she withdrew from my embrace, the full lips quivered like a child's when it is grieved, and the sweet voice was burdened with suffering, as she said, "And oh! Henri — who is to save me from *you* — from *myself?* It cannot be — no, no — it cannot be."

I sat as one stunned by an unexpected blow. *Devant Dieu!* I had never thought of that. What to say I knew not. The right words for me to say at this crisis would have been few and simple: "Be mine — *my wife*, dear Coralie?" In sooth, they were the only words that could be said at all to the point — but how, in Heaven's name, was I to say them? She did not appear to note my stupefaction, but, after a brief pause, went on: "I am right, Henri — it cannot be. I live amid dangers, perplexities, temptations — yet I cannot leave them to go to *you*. As yet I have never asked aught concerning your family; but you say you have neither mother nor sister; therefore you have no one in whose care you can place me. Though, supposing you had relatives, it would most probably be nothing in my favor, for they would scarcely be willing to receive such a waif as I. Then, supposing even that you had a mother — and that good mother was willing to receive me into her houshold; here my aunt's authority intervenes, and I could not leave her without her consent. No, Henri — I long to break away from my present life — to cast it from me into a Lethe of utter forgetfulness, if that were possible; but I cannot do so, unless I do it honorably. Where is the use of my beginning a 'new life' at

all, unless I commence it *in the right.* At the convent I became quite a proficient in two branches — music and ornamental needle-work. Of late I have implored my aunt to allow me to endeavor to procure some situation as a teacher of these branches — far away from here, where no one will ever know anything of what I am now. She will not listen to my entreaties. I have ventured to mention it to Marguerite, thinking that possibly she might aid me, for I am almost sure she loves me. She ridiculed the very idea. 'Who do you suppose would give *you* a place as a teacher?' she sneered. 'A fine teacher, truly — finished off at the "Maison des Bijoux;" in good sooth, a *very* superior instructress for our immaculate young ladies! Why, you crazy little simpleton, the very street beggars would mock at you! The good, "respectable" world has set its feet upon *our* necks, Coralie Lesueur — best not struggle to throw them off, or it will gently strangle us — smiling all the while in its sedate, respectable, and eternally sanctified way — you know.' And Marguerite is right — I cannot deny it. Her words are bitter, but they are the truth. I am fettered, pinioned, dungeoned. I feel every hour the galling, and hear the clanking of my chains. Oh! sweet Spirit-Mother of Christ! is there on earth *no hope for such as I?*"

She broke down at last. It was enough to melt a heart of stone — those pitiful words, those heart-wrung tones, so full of more than sadness — full of a grief which, being without hope, seemed scarcely less than despair. It seemed an "*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*" of the struggling soul, uttered while all Hope and Love hung in crucifixion, and surrounded by "a horror of great darkness"! Her hands were clasped convulsively, tears rained over the white and suffering face: tears rained also over mine. *Then* would have been the moment, had I been the strong-

souled, manly lover which she deemed me, to have drawn her to my bosom, and sworn to set her at once high above "the world's dread sneer," as mine — my own — *my wife!*

Great God! how it wrung my soul to know that this was beyond *my* power! It was *then* the deception I had practised stung me to the heart! I do not know if she expected such a course of action from me; — it was at least natural that she should. Any *real* lover, any true *man* would have done it — thinking it the very least that he could do, after all that had passed. But, I could not do that; and I did something that no *man* in the same circumstances would ever have thought of doing — something which naturally was the first thing that would occur to a *woman.* I did not ask her again to allow me to guide and protect her; I felt that we *both* needed a guidance and protection which no power on earth could bestow; so, throwing my arm around her waist and sinking to my knee, I murmured, "Darling! let us ask God for hope!"

In our great sorrow, kneeling side by side, our souls prayed in unison — silently — hers for her own griefs, mine for light, for strength, for courage, and for guidance. And I am fully persuaded that the All-Father heard us — his lonely orphans — and "gave his angels charge concerning us."

When we rose, the twilight had descended; the last weary devotee was leaving the shrine of his patron saint; dark shadows had gathered in every niche, and slept around the base of every column. One tender, lingering kiss I pressed upon the pale lips of Coralie, as I held her to my heart for a few brief moments; then I took her hand and led her from the church.

It was nearly dark when we descended to the street; there was a lull throughout the thoroughfares: Marguerite was nowhere to be seen. I started as the fact coolly stared

me in the face that I must accompany Coralie home. When I sprang from my sofa, determined just to see her — perhaps exchange a few words with her at vespers — I did not think of this. It was too late to *think* of it now — there was nothing left for me but just to *do* it. Circumstanced as I was, there was no other course for me to pursue, save to escort my fair charge to her home — that home the "Maison des Bijoux." I was going to that house again, and without, alas! without my good genius. Would any good angel accompany me instead? I trusted so — *s'il plaît à Dieu.* Strange to say, in my present excited frame of mind, I felt no hesitancy or apprehension. I felt strong, brave, and full of faith: *the emergency* was upon me, and I could meet it unflinchingly. I drew Coralie's arm within my own, and we turned off in the direction of the — to her — dreaded and detested "Maison des Bijoux."

CHAPTER X.

LA BELLE MARGUERITE.

Two spirits . . . one chaste and pale,
. . whose garments know no stain,
Whose patient lips are closed upon her pain.

The other bounding to her cymbal's clang,
A bold Bacchante, panting with the race
Of joy, the triumph, and the swift embrace;
And, gathering in one cup the grapes that hang
From every vine of Youth; around her head
The royal roses bare their hearts of red;
Music is on her lips, and from her face
Fierce freedom shines, and wild alluring grace.
. . . . Then I met her look,
The conquering gaze of those bold eyes which made—
Ah, God! the unrepented sin appear more fair
Than Magdalene kneeling with her humbled hair,
Or Agatha beneath the quæstor's blade!

BAYARD TAYLOR.

LAMPS were glimmering here and there along the city streets, as we passed on, choosing the most retired ways. Silently we threaded the half-lighted thoroughfares, each seemingly absorbed in reflection. I ran over our positions in my mind as we walked on. I had determined not to run the risk of again visiting the "Maison des Bijoux," until after Sigismond's return; yet here I was as regularly pacing my way to it as though some strong hand were drawing me by a chain knotted around my body. Fate seemed weaving her spells about me; and, by

a trifling occurrence, which had, nevertheless, taken the shape of a *necessity* which I could not avoid, I found myself pursuing the path which led to its dreaded portal. A *gentleman*, I could not allow Coralie to find her way home alone; and now the question arose, could my woman's impatience and curiosity be satisfied — seeing I was in a manner compelled to go there — to depart without an interview with Madame Lesueur in reference to that mysterious picture and letter? I began to feel that the temptation was greater than I could withstand. I began to be fired with the determination to take advantage of this opportunity, and, if possible, either ferret out or force the secrets of Madame's all-concealing eyes; I began to believe myself brave enough to go searching for secrets into the graves of the dead Past — even with her eyes, like ghouls, haunting me at every step. I had been so racked by impatience, anxiety, and suspense, why not seek an interview with Madame Lesueur *now*, and end the matter at once? If I failed in eliciting the information which I coveted, and which I was confident she possessed, why — I should lose nothing; but, if — ah! *if* I should be able to fathom the mystery which surrounded Coralie, and *prove* that, by her birthright at least, she belonged to a higher and better sphere than this into which she appeared to have been cast by "some disastrous fate," what a triumph it would be to tell it all to Sigismond, upon his return! And what happiness, to think that I, a woman, had been the means of assisting a lovely sister-woman, and placing her where God, when he created her pure, bright spirit, designed that she should stand! My cheek glowed; my heart bounded at the thought — I felt strong and brave, equal to the scene through which I knew I should be obliged to pass; and, as we neared the house, my pulses throbbed full and regularly; the strong, persistent *purpose* had a calming effect

upon me. I pressed Coralie's hand, and whispered, "I am going in with you, dearest. Will you hasten to Madame Lesueur, and ask her to 'allow me the pleasure of an interview?' I must find out something about that picture — and that this very night."

"Oh! Henri; and will you tell her you have seen it — and how?" she asked, in startled tones.

"Certainly; I shall tell her all about it — that is to say, if you are willing. Would it not be best?"

"Madame may think I have done wrong in showing it to you. What do *you* think?" she inquired, in reply.

"That you have done right, *ma chère*. If Madame should happen to differ with me — why, it's done now, and can't be undone. I don't see that it makes any great difference what *her* opinion on the subject may be," I replied.

"But I do, Henri," said Coralie, in her soft, sweet tones. "I am grateful to Madame, and I would not give her annoyance if I could avoid it. I do not wish to seem unkind or ungrateful to her, when I am *not*, Heaven knows."

"And she knows it also," I answered. "But here we are, almost at your own door. Now, dearest Coralie, you must conduct me at once into Madame's private parlor. If she is there, very well; if she is not, you must find her immediately, and say that I wish to speak with her. Then go to your own room, but do not retire; it may be that I shall have a few words to say to you after I have seen the Madame. I cannot see you often, and I am so very anxious to bear you from this place. Let us go in now — Stay, *nom de Dieu!* Stop a moment!" I exclaimed, springing back into the deep shadow and drawing my companion with me. And well it was that we had gone no farther, and that we gained the friendly shade of the wall as speedily as we did, for at that moment, coming up from the opposite side into the light of the doorway, we beheld one

of the "young men about town," arm in arm with Jules Berthêl, who seemed something the worse for his after-dinder glass.

Coralie's arm trembled as I held it clasped, and I confess my own pulses beat a trifle faster. Had my gentle companion had time for thought, she would probably not have deemed me a very courageous cavalier; but she did not appear to think of it, in her anxiety that I should avoid Berthêl. "How fortunate!" she breathed, as the two young men passed into the house just before us; "how fortunate you did not meet him! They have entered — but, wait here one moment, until I speak to the servant who showed them in." She darted off as she spoke, without giving me time for a word; and in a minute or two fluttered back to me, exclaiming, in an undertone, "It 's all right. Monsieur Berthêl did not ask for me; he called for Marguerite, to whom he wishes to present a friend of his, and they have gone into the *salon*. We can enter now."

Drawing her arm in mine again, we passed in: she half-opened the door of the private parlor, ushering me in, and whispered, "I will send Madame directly: do not on any account leave without seeing me. I could not bear — *I must know* the result of your interview." She glided away, and as she passed down the hall, I heard her say to the servant in waiting, "No one enters there to-night but Madame herself — you understand, Jean?"

"*Oui*, mademoiselle."

The door closed, and I found myself once more in that luxurious apartment, with its sumptuous appointments, its atmosphere of heavy fragrance, its soft, shaded light, and its general air of sensuous, Circean enchantment. And, directly before me, a fitting presiding spirit of the scene, stood Marguerite — a superb embodiment of ripe and glowing beauty, born, it seemed, to burn, bewilder, and,

alas! perhaps betray, all who came under the spell of her magnetic influence. She was pacing softly to and fro as I entered; and now she merely paused a moment, bowed slightly, and resumed her walk. And as I threw myself upon the nearest sofa — agitated a very little now that the long-expected hour of meeting Madame Lesueur had actually arrived, and not a little puzzled to decide upon the best manner of opening this delicate investigation — I could not but remark and admire the magnificent-looking woman before me, and compare her in my mind to some gorgeous tropical blossom, swaying to and fro upon the summer sea. The motion was so silent, so effortless, reminding one of nothing but rich blooms borne on the ebb and flow of waves. What a woman was Marguerite! A creature overflowing with a warm, dark-blooded vitality — one of those beings whose imperious pulses throb with a free, full life — whose senses are so many gates through which the flood-tide of human enjoyment flows — beings formed expressly for Love and Luxury, and to whom pride, passion, and pleasure are as necessary as the air they breathe. Revelling, as she did, in all the opulence of physical beauty — of a nature half-sensuous, half-poetic — with a spirit of fire, and a heart wherein I felt assured that some good still lingered, I experienced a strong and increasing interest in her; and this led me to wonder to myself how she came to be in her present position. I knew nothing of her past, or the circumstances which had brought about her fatal *present*, but I felt that it was the result of some sudden and fearful crisis in her young life, and that she had not always been a "lost goddess, with a sullied name." In some fatal hour, when her guardian angel slumbered, or, sadder still, perchance had "turned away," her moral sense had grown bewildered, her brain become confused by the intoxication of some sub-

tle temptation, and she had fallen — never, alas! never to rise again. Yet, ah! how beautiful she was — and how very different from Coralie. Titian might have created the one, with his gorgeous pencil and burning dyes; Raphael alone could have faithfully portrayed the other, and that with his hues of heaven.

As these thoughts floated across my mind, Marguerite paused directly in front of me, waving a folded newspaper which she held in her hand, after the manner of a fan, and said, with an odd, half-mocking, half-patronizing smile, "How we are improving! You must allow me to congratulate you, Monsieur d'Herbelot, in that you have been able so soon to slip your leading-strings. You are here, I see — actually *here*, and without your masculine *bonne*, the Señor d'Alvarez. You are an apt pupil, *mon petit*."

"*Oui, mademoiselle, je vous remercie*," I replied with real nonchalance. Her remarks and tone would have enraged *a boy*, according to her intention; but they had no such effect upon me. "That you see me here alone, is true," I continued; "a good purpose often provides us with courage, you know."

She laughed in my face — a short, sudden, contemptuous laugh; and said, abruptly, "Don't trouble yourself to be hypocritical, little gentleman. It is n't worth your while to put on the 'good boy' in gilt labels, for *my* benefit — that won't pay, with me: a mere waste of labels, which you will need to use in presence of your family and friends. I am well aware of the 'good purpose' that brings you here: it is not an unusual thing — in fact, it is a very general thing, that people come here for 'good purposes.' 'Hell,' they say, is 'paved with good intentions' — doubtless, *this* establishment (which is a 'branch' of the former) can boast of a somewhat similar flooring. But, you see how soft it is — how your 'good intentions' yield to Pas-

sion or Pleasure — thus;" and she pressed her shapely slippered foot down upon that carpet of brilliant and moss-like velvet, until it sank, seemingly, over the slipper — half-buried, as it were, among the rich and glowing flowers. Drawing back, she resumed her walk — only she paced now in front of my sofa; and continued speaking, more to herself than to me: "Yes — a little pressure from human will, or human passion, and your 'good intentions' give way, and are lost amid the senses' soft and glowing blooms." Then facing me again, she added: "I speak thus to warn you, Monsieur Henri. You love Coralie Lesueur, and you are endeavoring to win her away from us; whether or not your 'intentions' are good — as you have boasted — I think you scarcely know yourself. Doubtless, you flatter yourself that they are; I, perhaps, read you more truthfully. You are young yet — not strong enough to stand up facing a wicked action, and plunge into it despite its wickedness: nay, for a while yet, you will gloss it over with a 'good intention.' But let me whisper to you, young gentleman, your dainty robe of 'good purpose' hides a cloven foot; and, as one of your poets has it —

'The devil's most devilish when *respectable!*'"

"Marguerite!" I broke forth impulsively, despite the bitter sneer which darkened her splendid face as she hissed in my ear the word "respectable," — "Marguerite! I can call upon God, and all his angels, to bear witness to the purity — the disinterestedness — the —"

"Stop there!" she interrupted, in a sharp, sudden way; "no oaths — I know the worth of men's vows. The commodity is stale. And, if you please, make your language intelligible. Leave your gods and angels to children, and talk — if you must talk — about men and women. *There are such things — in form*, at least." Her tone was deep and incisive beyond conception.

"*Pardonnez.* Words are wasted upon you, I fear, mademoiselle," I said, coolly. "I foresee that anything I may say will not have the honor of your credence. We will not quarrel about that. You believe there are such things as men and women — but a *good* man, or a *noble* woman, you don't believe in. *I do:* and therein lies the difference."

She laughed again, quietly, and looked out at me from between half-lowered, level eyelids, as one might regard the sallies of some precocious child. "Said I not that we were improving?" she spoke, at length. "You read me admirably, Monsieur *Petit.* Certainly, I should not trouble myself to credit your protestations, for the reason that you would put yourself to extraordinary trouble to tell me everything but — the truth. Believe in what you are pleased to style a 'good man'? *Never!* Had I the mental force of all your mythical angels, I should never be equal to *that.* If God created *men,* I conclude that, by this time, He is heartily ashamed of his work; and has determined, in his own mind, that he is not much of a deity after all — or his creations would be more to the purpose."

"As a man, I have nothing to say in favor of my sex; your judgment shall be mine. It is rude to dispute the word of a lady. But what say you to the 'noble woman'? Is there such a phenomenon?"

She seemed to like my cool, sarcastic tone, for she smiled approvingly, and said: "Yes, señor, I grant that such a thing may exist: something as we grant there is in the world a city of Paris, though we have never seen it, and never expect to. To find such a woman, however, is like sending one out into the swamps here to find a particular leaf. It *is* a leaf — *somewhat* peculiar, *somehow* to be identified — and verily *somewhere* in all those miles of forest. The leaf exists, no doubt; but I misdoubt if, under these circumstances, you discover it, nevertheless."

"Have *you* never found such a leaf — a 'noble woman'?" I asked.

"*I?* Not I! If I had, I should not have been, perhaps — what I am to-night. If I could find such a leaf, I would cherish it evermore as a talisman, by which I, too, should become — a saint, probably — who knows?" and she laughed again, as though she spoke it all in jest. "Yet stay; I am too fast," she said, a moment afterward. "I do believe that I have once, just once in my life, found what would make that magic, all-healing, talismanic leaf, 'a good woman,' if it grew anywhere save in this noisome, pestilential swamp *here;* and that creature who, if she could, would make a 'noble woman' is — Coralie Lesueur. It was for her sake, because she is more like 'good' than anything I ever saw, that I have spoken to you to-night. I warn *you* solemnly, never to make her less 'good.'"

"Your warning is wholly unnecessary, mademoiselle. Coralie shall never suffer wrong by any act of mine. I could —"

"Do not add direct falsehood to your very honest 'intentions,'" she sneered. "I am well aware what all that amounts to. What do men generally make of the woman they 'love' so devotedly, and toward whom they always entertain such saintly 'intentions'? I will tell you: slaves, or serpents, or suicides? I will read you a description of how women can be manufactured into outcasts by this same potential power — *a man's 'love.'* It was this very article, hit upon by accident, which determined me to remain here and speak to you, though others are waiting for me, even now." She shook out the paper which she had been using as a fan, and, stepping nearer to the lamp, with the air of an inspired Pythoness, and in tones whose remembrance thrills me even yet, she read:

THE PARIAH.

[As if she were a part of the wrecks cast out by the waves, and left to corruption and decay, the girl we had followed stood on the river's brink, in the midst of this night-picture, lonely and still, looking down into the water. — DICKENS.]

. . . . Dark lay the sullen scene,
Like a foul plague-spot slowly deepening
In Nature's bosom. Dim and drearily
The din of multitudes came up
From the close, crowded city; yet this spot
Was lonely as the grave; and through the chill
And melancholy waste the river wound
Like a dull earthworm through a sepulchre.
In vaulted vastness rose the storming sky;
And the wild winds, like prisoned birds of prey,
Flew shrieking round the impenetrable gloom
That barred the black horizon; while afar
The thunder's hollow warning crept along
The troubled night-sky; and the stars were hid
Close in their cloudy caverns. Desolate
A low street, with its crumbling tenements,
Lay by the river's margin: on the brink
The rank grass nodded; poison-weeds held up
Their livid chalices and baneful leaves
Spotted as with a leprosy. Above
Rose the rude battlements and rereward walls
Of a deserted citadel; and o'er
The turbid waters stretched a ruined bridge
Like a huge, mouldering skeleton; its lamp
Burned, a low, lurid beacon, and the light
Writhed like a serpent on the inky flood
That murmured through the arches.
. . . . . Cowering
'Mid the dark foliage and slimy stones,
As if in misery to stifle shame,
Crouched the poor Pariah. Betrayed, alone,
Lost utterly, yet strangely beautiful,
As some wan, wildered blossom hanging on

The haggard brow of Ruin! Wondrous fair
The slender fingers clenching aimlessly
At the polluted plants; all wild the cloud
Of raven tresses from the forehead flung;
Sunk the despairing eye as if to hide,
Within its own deep darkness, from the light's
Insulting sneer. She shuddered when the flash
Of the far lightning fell athwart her brow,
As if it were a demon's kiss: and when
The keen and icy wind struck sharply through
Her white and faded bosom, she would start
With a quick agony, as though the beak
Of some fierce vulture fastened in her heart.
To her the Present was a dreary realm
Peopled with dreams of horror: to the Past
She dared not now return; for Sin and Shame,
Two gaunt-eyed sentinels, stood frowningly
Beside the portal; and the Future? ah!
Its very thought was insupportable.
She looked a moment to the starless sky —
Its thunder-voice rebuked her for the glance —
Never a light of Heaven's was there — for her.
She heard the sullen, sounding waters dash
On the old dungeon-walls — then fall again
From the rude stone-work, like the troubled stream
Of her affections wasted on a heart
That cast it off with scorn: she saw the tide
Sweep swiftly through the bridge's caverned arch;
And to her gaze it seemed the Gate of Death,
Barred by a flaming serpent's hideous coil.
Her heart was broken. Not one hope illumed
Its shattered chambers; and existence seemed
One mighty multitude of mocking eyes,
And hissing tongues, that stung her sullied soul
To madness. From the frozen lips up-rose
The moan of an unspoken prayer; a name
She called, as softly as our spirits breathe
Of one the Lord has taken; yet 't was *his*
Who robbed the soul-shrine of its precious pearl,

To melt it in a cup of bitterness
And unavailing tears. — Then upward rose,
O'er the wild, wailing winds, the wilder cry
Of human agony; a surging plunge
Parted the inky flood; a white arm broke
The serpent-barrier, then sank beneath
The blackened archway; and the haunted shore
Was blank and lone!
Thus perished the Betrayed!
The Tempter, deep betrayer, *murderer*,
Stood, with unblushing front and haughty eye,
Amid the circles of the proud and gay;
Men took his hand; and high-born Beauty bowed
To list his flatteries, unheeding all
A sister's ruined fame and broken heart,
And lone, cold slumber — where the river moans
Her requiem!

Rachel nor Ristori, in their palmiest days, could have surpassed that unrivalled reading. Shaken to the very depths of her powerful, passionate nature, she threw her whole soul into the rendering; and the effect upon me was *almost* superhuman. What a grand interpreter of pathos and passion was lost to the world when this stately Marguerite recklessly registered herself among its truly "lost"! Yet I think she was wholly unconscious of her power; for, while my hair rose on my head, and every nerve within me was still thrilling with the magic of her utterance and action, she turned, threw the paper from her, and advanced toward me. Bending down upon me a pair of glowing, glorious eyes —

"Full of dark witchery, like wandering fire
Far-shining down a fathomless abyss" —

she said: "My time is short; but of one thing I must warn you. Beware how you bring upon Coralie Lesueur the doom of that dead woman; dead — and, if there be a

hell, damned! You see this?" and placing her hand upon her bodice, she held up a keen, slender, blue blade, which flashed and glittered in the soft light — "you see it?"

I assented.

"Very well. Dare to wrong the one creature in all the world that *I* love — the single creature in all this world who has ever shed a tear over the miseries of poor, lost Marguerite — Marguerite both dead and damned; and *this* shall find your heart — if, indeed, being a man, you possess one! Remember!"

Springing up from the sofa, I caught her uplifted arm; clenching tightly in both mine the hand in which the dagger flashed and blazed, I drew it down to her side, and said, softly, "Be still, now. Believe me, you will never use it, Marguerite. But, oh! say not, 'lost Marguerite' — for you are *not* 'lost'! There are pure feelings in your heart; noble impulses in your nature, all powerful for your redemption still. Ah! Marguerite,

> 'The sunshine, broken in the rill,
> Though warped aside, *is sunshine still;*'

and, if you would but look above, to the Great Source of all the soul's light — if you would but pray —"

"Off!" she cried, flinging away my hands, and drawing up her superb figure to its full commanding height with a haughty *fierté* which was indescribable — almost sublime. "Off!" she repeated; "*you* — *a man* — and dare preach to *me!* Begone! Down — down into the dens where you send the souls of women such as *I was once*, to rot and rankle, to burn and blacken forevermore! Back! back into the hells you kindle for poor, worn, and weary hearts — which, ere *you* met them, were as soft as the sweet south, and pure as Zembla's snows!" And as I sank back

half cowering from the hot lances of her glowing eyes, she threw aloft her arm, with the dagger gleaming and flashing about her head, and poured forth upon me, in words of power, *such a portraiture!* With a fearful vividness, she pictured their life — the struggle with want, and woe, and wretchedness — the horrible shapes of sin, and misery, and despair which surround that deep-seated social cancer; and oh! with what heart-crushing pathos she wailed the curse that had fallen upon her young life — with what heart-chilling energy and earnestness she flung back upon the souls of men the curses and the shame! Bold, rapid, and fiery — impetuous as a torrent in its flow — scathing like hot lava whatever it touched — I could remember nothing of the *words;* but the spirit, the fierceness, and the force might have crushed an angel — *had he been guilty.* Something it was like the language which Mrs. BROWNING has since given to "Marian Erle;" only differing as the character of Marguerite differs from that of the gentle Marian.

". . . . . And you call it being 'lost,'
That next day's noon came down, and found me there
Half-gibbering and half-raving on the floor,
And wondering what had happened up in heaven
That suns should dare to shine, when God himself
Was certainly abolished!
. . . . . True,
We wretches cannot tell out all our wrong
Without offence to decent, happy folk.
I know that we must scrupulously hint
With half-words, delicate reserves, the thing
Which no one scrupled we should feel in full!
I went forth headlong, over a precipice,
In such a swirl of hell-foam caught, and choked,
No shriek of soul in anguish could pierce through
To fetch me help. They say there 's help in heaven
For all such cries. But if one cries from hell,
What then? The heavens are deaf upon that side!"

In the wild earnestness and energy of her denunciations, fully forgetting herself, Marguerite had scarce time to bring down her defiant arm, and thrust the stiletto into her silken bodice, when the soft, stealthy step of Madame Lesueur was heard at the door, and that dignified personage entered, full-blown in her delicate *rouge* and ample flounces.

"Marguerite!" she ejaculated — surprised out of her usual studied equanimity for a moment; but instantly recollecting herself, she added, in a kindly tone, "Why are you here, mademoiselle? Do you not know that fully half an hour has passed since Monsieur Berthêl requested your presence in the *salon?*"

"*Oui*, madame," answered the spoiled beauty, with cool carelessness; "but Monsieur Berthêl, or Monsieur anybody else, can wait. To entertain your young friend here until you came, I was endeavoring to show him how Signorina — who was it? — used to 'do' the Medea at the Opera House last winter. Magnificent affair — was it not, Señor *Petit?*" she added, turning to me with the old mocking smile in her eye, and the contemptuous curl upon her red, ripe lips. Then, with a slight courtesy, and "*Bon soir, mes amies,*" she was gone.

CHAPTER XI.

SEARCHING FOR SECRETS.

And no one said to me, "Why mournest thou?"
  Because she was the unknown child of shame,
(Albeit her mother better kept the vow
  Of faithful love, than some who keep their fame.)
Poor mother and poor child! . . .
Oh! many a hopeless love like this may be,
  For love will live that never looks to win;
Gems, rashly lost in Passion's stormy sea,
  Ne'er to be lifted forth, when once cast in!

MRS. NORTON.

BEAUTIFUL creature — but a little 'wild,'" apologized Madame Lesueur, in that half-approving, half-deprecating way, adopted by anxious mammas when excusing certain "raids" which hoydenish daughters are apt to make upon the intrenchments of the staid "proprieties." It was admirably assumed — a stranger would not have detected the difference between her feeling and that of the anxious mamma. The lady then came forward to an easy *fauteuil*, where the light of the shaded lamp fell softly, and gracefully motioned me to a seat directly opposite her own. Evidently the position was a favorite one; had been rehearsed over and over again, and Madame Lesueur knew very well in what light, shade, and *pose* she appeared to the greatest advantage. Altogether, as she sat there in that lustrous atmosphere, (for the room seemed luminous rather than lighted,) so perfectly self-poised, so well costumed, and apparently so anxious to please, she was rather

a fine-looking person. Her figure was stately, if not full; her complexion "wonderfully made," and her eyes had lost, in a measure, the steely, hungry look which had so confused me upon our former meeting.

"And now," began the lady blandly, as the diamond-dropped fingers of one large hand beat a tattoo upon the marble table at her side, "I must crave your pardon, Monsieur d'Herbelot, for detaining you. When a servant brought me Mademoiselle Coralie's whispered message, I was engaged. While Jean was inquiring everywhere for *la belle* Marguerite, I was entertaining Monsieur Berthêl myself, in my own sitting-room."

"Ah! pardon me, madame; but does Monsieur Berthêl know that I — that I am *here?*" I broke forth, awkwardly and bluntly enough, it must be confessed.

"Certainly not, my dear sir. Your being here is *your* affair, not *his;* is it not?" she answered with a half-smile, at my *gaucherie*, no doubt. "But now, in return for your question, may I ask to what I am indebted for the honor of your visit this evening?"

"With great propriety; and I shall be most happy, madame, to answer you plainly and truthfully," I replied, as I rose, and, going to the door, turned the key, and then resumed my seat.

"No necessity for that, sir; no one intrudes *here*," said the lady, glancing round the elegant apartment with an air that seemed to say, "Let them *dare* do it!" "And from this," she added aloud, "I infer that you desire our conference to be a secret one."

"Strictly so, if you please, madame. Our interview concerns only you, myself, and one other."

"Ah! in that case I divine your errand, monsieur. I foresaw this — you love my niece. Pray, proceed, sir," bowed the lady; and I took her at her word: I *did* "pro-

ceed." Plunging at once into the subject, as usual, I poured forth assurances of my love for Coralie, and my desires concerning her future life; gave rapid reviews of our meetings at Carrollton, the Place d'Armes, and the Cathedral; I narrated, circumstantially, all that had occurred in regard to the picture and letter; in short, I made a full, free, rapid, and eloquent confession; and concluded with an appeal to her sympathies (?) and a demand to know the original of the portrait, and author of the letter. She had started visibly, despite her self-possession, and half risen from her seat, as I recounted Coralie's abstraction of those telltale (or, rather *tell-nought*) articles from her writing-desk; but, as I proceeded, she calmed down, apparently, and sank back upon the *fauteuil.* Yet, I could see it was a forced calm, and that, notwithstanding her nerves were "ironed down," she was perceptibly agitated. My mission was not exactly what she had anticipated. She sat looking at me with half-lowered lids, the trenchant blades of those eyes again transfixing my whole being, as though they would lay bare every thought and feeling.

"May I ask again, madame, who is the original of that portrait, and the writer of that mutilated letter?" I exclaimed, with deep earnestness and energy.

"Certainly, señor. You are at liberty to inquire just as often as it may suit your fancy to do so," she replied, with inimitable coolness.

"But I am here for the very purpose of investigating this matter — and it must be done, madame," I uttered, somewhat imperiously.

"Oh — oh! you are. Very well, sir; proceed with your investigation: you will oblige me by commencing at once," the lady responded, with a slight smile.

"It is a matter," I continued, "which is of vital interest. For the happiness of Coralie, and for my own, it must be

looked into and unravelled. More — it must be done quickly; for I cannot, and will not, endure this suspense."

"You are quite right in your determination, I dare say — so I would advise your 'looking into it' immediately," replied the Madame, again bringing her bediamonded fingers into play upon the marble. The stone itself was not more impassive than she.

"But I must have your co-operation, madame."

"Ah! well said, my young friend. You have been some time in making this important discovery. *That*, however, was a 'step in the right direction.' Secure my co-operation, and you may be able to commence your investigation," she calmly replied.

"Will you be kind enough to inform me how that can be done?" I asked, quickly.

She laughed — that short, disagreeable laugh which had grated on my ear once before; and said, after a pause, "I see plainly, Monsieur d'Herbelot, that you know nothing whatever about conducting an investigation. You do not even understand the first principles."

"If you will do me the kindness to name them, I will set myself to study them immediately," I replied.

"No doubt of it, señor. Let me think a moment: you love Coralie. What is your family and position?"

"Of the very best in Louisiana, madame."

"Ah! say you so? In what part of the State do you reside?"

"Pardon me; that is my affair."

"True; and has no connection with the subject in hand, you would add. I asked because I have inquired of several gentlemen who visit my house, and no one appears to have any knowledge of you. Even Monsieur Berthêl, who seems to know everybody, said he had never before heard of Monsieur d'Herbelot. Your likeness to that picture

prompted me to those inquiries. And, by-the-by, I do not see that striking resemblance to-night, as I did at our first meeting. It was, I presume, a passing fancy."

"Let us return to 'first principles,' if you please, madame."

"Ah! truly, you are right, sir," and she smiled again. "Belonging to one of the 'first families,' you have a fortune at your disposal? Your family is a wealthy one?" queried the lady.

"That is understood, is it not?" I queried in turn; and again she smiled, this time patronizingly.

"And you would make Coralie your wife?" she added, after a brief pause. The blood rushed into my face—here was a dilemma!

"*Pardonnez—je vous prie*—but I—" and what upon earth I intended to say, I cannot tell. Whatever it was, I lost it instantly, and Madame Lesueur seemed to enjoy my confusion. Flattering herself that she divined the cause, (and how very wide it was of the truth!) she said, in her cool, calm-considering way, "Don't mind it. There is no necessity for blushes; you are young, monsieur, *very young*," with a strong emphasis on the adjective, and a tone which might lead one to suppose that youth was a most deplorable infirmity.

"I only meant to say, madame, that in consideration of my family, and my honor as a gentleman, I suppose *that* also is understood," I said, clearing the difficulty at a bound.

"Were you an older man, and more experienced in what the world calls 'honor,' etc., there would be two ways of understanding your last remark," she replied, slowly. "It would conflict with the family and personal 'honor' of many men to wed Coralie from this house; while it would not conflict with their 'honor' in the least to—sink

her to perdition. But, I accept the meaning which I am sure *you* intended, and am satisfied."

"'First principles,' now madame — it grows late," I said, looking at my watch. Her eyes gleamed as they fell upon the trinket, which was set with small diamonds, and she replied: "The first principles of an 'investigation,' Monsieur d'Herbelot, are *finesse* and — *money!*"

I caught her meaning instantly. Vexation! how obtuse not to have known it before! I must *buy* the secret, not *beg* it. Money? why, I had money — and I remembered the leathern case containing the bank notes, which my father had given me. I pulled it at once from my side-pocket — with it came the little pistol, and, upon the impulse of the moment, I cocked the weapon and aimed it at her bosom with one hand, while I clenched the case with the other, and exclaimed, excitedly, "*That* for your secret, *this* for your silence!" and held the muzzle within a few inches of her heart. Her breathing did not quicken; her eyelids did not even fall, as, with that same dry smile, she put out her hand, took the leathern book from mine, and began leisurely to count its contents, saying, as with a nod she indicated the pistol: "As well put that up, señor. Such things make a noise." And she coolly went to work, counting the money twice over, that there might be no mistake!

"Five hundred in bills — very good notes, too — no discount," she half soliloquized; "one hundred in gold — six — not a very great amount, after all; but I presume all your pocket-money, at present, monsieur. But then — there's the watch; I suppose you would part with that also, for a good secret?" I laid it in her extended, grasping palm.

"And how much might this be worth? It's a tiny affair — looks as though it ought to belong to a lady," she said, regarding the brilliant setting.

"It cost four hundred dollars, madame."

"Six and four — ten; a thousand dollars. Well, that will do for the present. It might be more and please me better — but, if you say so, monsieur, it shall be a bargain. All the information I am able to afford in reference to Coralie and that picture, and then — this is mine," and she grasped the money and watch tightly in both her large, greedy hands.

"I agree to that, madame," I replied, regarding her with cold contempt; "and, as the last of my availables at present, you may take this also," and I handed out the gold-mounted pistol.

"Thank you! you may keep that to assassinate flies," she answered, with her peculiar, grating laugh. "Besides, young gentlemen should never threaten ladies. Think how you have acted toward me. I did not expect you — *faire le mauvais.* Take away the little toy — I don't like them — they are noisy. These are better — much better; they tell no tales to near policemen;" and touching a golden chain which hung at her belt, she half drew from the folds of her ample robe a keen and glittering blade; then sunk it again as quickly into the sheath. "Heavens! what a set of women!" was my mental ejaculation. "Are they all so bloodthirsty?"

"Are we agreed, señor?" she said, looking into my face, and meeting unconcernedly my glance of astonishment. I bowed assent. I was beginning to understand her, and to keep as cool as possible, since the more anxiety I exhibited, the more she was inclined to trifle with my feelings.

"Very well," she replied. "And now for my story — which is brief and simple. First of all, then, Coralie is not my niece — no drop of kindred blood runs in her blue veins and mine! She —"

"Thank God for *that!*" I burst out — it seemed as

though a mountain had been lifted from my brain and heart.

"You are pleased to be complimentary, monsieur — but *n'importe*," said this strange woman. She paused for more than a minute; her eyes cast down, and a shade — yes, wonderful to see! an expression of real feeling stole slowly into the still, impassive face. She was going back into the Past, and old memories stirred within her calloused heart. When she spoke again I started — scarcely believing it was her voice — so changed, so melancholy. "Yes," she resumed, "I am all alone in the world. I have no real claim even upon Coralie — the only thing I have had to love for many and many a day."

Now I was more astonished than ever: the idea of that stony, selfish woman experiencing a 'love' for anything — save money! I could scarce credit my senses. She went on: "It was in the summer of 1834, about the fifth day of June, I think — (the date inscribed on the picture is the first of June) — I was then living in a very poor way in Natchez, Mississippi — the wife of a year; and, though honest and faithful, still a deserted wife, with a dying babe on my bosom. On that evening, a young woman, with a babe in her arms, came up from a Southern boat which had touched at the wharf — to my little dwelling, which stood near the landing — 'under the hill' as it is called — and begged the shelter of my poor roof, that she might not die in the open streets. She was lovely — oh! very lovely. Coralie, in despair, half-frenzied, and dying, *as she was*, would be just her image. She was broken-hearted, like myself; so I never asked her name, or family, or history, but laid down my baby, and fixed my only bed for her; for she was, as I said, just at death's door — and I believe, half-crazed with grief and pain. Her babe, she said, was five days old — having been born on the first

of the month; and here she was, walking from the boat and carrying it: it was the last time, poor thing! She had come up on the boat, from below, but from what point I never asked, for she died that very night — and no wonder; and my baby died too. It was laid away next day in the pauper's burying-ground, on *her* bosom; and I took her child to *mine*. It was a great comfort to me — Coralie always has been; and I have loved her well. I longed to have her call me mother, but she grew up so beautiful and so unlike me, that I decided to call her a niece. She is not even that, however; and I thank God for it sometimes — when I feel softened, and more human — as I do now. When I was preparing her mother for the grave, I found that picture and letter in the bosom of the dress she wore, and that was all. There was no mark upon her linen, which was fine and costly, though her outer garb was common enough for a servant. There were a few dollars in her pocket — scarcely enough to pay for her poor grave and carrying her to it — and that is all. Now Monsieur d' — "

"You surely do not mean to say that, after all, you do not know who is, or was, the original of that picture, or who wrote the letter?" I cried, interrupting her, in my agony of impatience.

"*No more than you do, sir?*" was the exasperating reply. "As I told you, the young mother died, and 'made no sign.' I had neither the time nor the heart to ask her questions. It might have been the father of her child, young and boyish as it looks; it might have been a brother, though it does not resemble what she was; and I fancied it resembled *you*. I could not trouble the poor thing then with questions — she was nearly gone. She may have been a poor deserted creature like myself, or she may have been worse. She bore a broken heart, sir; and so did I — and

that was enough." The voice grew husky and tremulous —and a tear dropped from her downcast eyes upon the jewelled hand which lay in her lap — and glittered there; the most precious jewel of them all! After a pause, she resumed, in a low, sad tone: "I need not tell you, monsieur, of my succeeding life. I will not attempt to justify myself — but simply say that what I am, man's cruelty and injustice have made me — let that suffice. Two years ago I came to this city. I purchased this property of Monsieur Berthêl, and I still owe him money. He oppresses me greatly; for I am not rich — our way of life does not allow us to become so — often. We dress, it is true — that is a part of our vocation; but I am poor, still. He has sworn to me a thousand times that he will give up every bond he holds against me, if I will give him — *mon Dieu!* — think of it, monsieur — *Coralie!* Sell the child to him, body and soul! never, never, so help me God! I am not sunk low enough for *that* — we will die in the streets first. This money will help me much; and though I know 't is a mean act to take it as I do, I take it to satisfy this man a little longer, and save Coralie for the time from his persecutions. This very night, when she sent for me to say that you were here, he was driving me to desperation by his threats and his entreaties. Must I take it, *monsieur?*"

"All — all — would it were ten times as much," I cried. "And now go, and send Coralie to me; I must tell her all this before I leave —"

"Stay!" she whispered; "let me think. Will that do — is it not too soon to tell her?"

"I *must* tell her, madame, and that immediately."

"Well, well. She is discreet; I presume 't is just as well now as again. I will tell her to come. We may meet again to-night — if not, *bon soir.*"

I rose, accompanied her to the door, and, unlocking it,

allowed her to pass out. I stood behind it, the knob in my hand: through the small opening, I heard her say, politely, "You are not going? Excuse me, sir, but I wish to speak, for a few moments, with Monsieur Berthêl."

"Perfectly, and always, at *your* service, madame. Wait for me at the St. Charles, Mowbray," said the deep voice of Jules Berthêl. Then, some one descended the door-steps; I heard Marguerite's joyless laugh, as she came from the *salon;* and, finally, footsteps sounded as though going back, in the direction of the sitting-room — then all was silent. I closed the door, and sat down to wait for Coralie.

CHAPTER XII.

"BETRAYED."

She was tall, and fair,
  And in her summer's prime;
Her feet were snowy feet,
  And faultless as a rhyme
    When 't is true;
And her eyes were made of heaven's
    Fire and dew!

In the kirk-yard let her lie!
  Let the thistles and the burrs
  Cover up that life of hers.
    Well-a-day!
'T is sad to see a flower
    Dead in May!

Now, Lord Nial sails the sea,
  And he laughs above his wine:
But he never, never thinks
  Of the Lily of Loch-Ine.
    May the storms
Smite him as he sails, and the sea
    Crush him in its arms!

BALLAD.

STILLNESS reigned throughout the house for some minutes, except that, at intervals, a low sound of voices in the saloon, softened by closed doors, penetrated to the apartment where I stood — and once, when the voice of some singer, at the piano, arose, seeming to come from afar. The instrument could scarcely be heard at all, save in the pauses of the voice; but the air was wild and sad

— more like a dirge than a song. It was one I had heard before, sung to a ballad called "Betrayed," commencing,

"She was tall, and fair,
And in her summer's prime."

The voice that sang was sweet and clear, with a sort of mellow, mournful wailing in each closing cadence, that went to the very soul. I remembered the fair girl, with the statue-like shoulders and antique Greek face, whom I had seen at the piano on my first visit to this house — and wondered if this singer could be she. Somehow, the music made me think of a fragile boat freighted with one solitary human soul, far out at sea; and the voice seemed the sweet, wild wail of that poor, weary wanderer, sighing for some starry island-shore — for the infinite brightness and beauty of that eternal haven

"Where there shall be no more sea."

I had no time, however, for giving way to the sadness which was fast coming over me at the sound of that voice of melodious melancholy; for, at this moment, almost ere the song had ceased, there was a light rustle in the hall, a quick footfall, the door opened, and Coralie sank into the arms outstretched to receive her. She was trembling with intense excitement.

"What is it? who is it, Henri? — the picture — quick! quick! tell me —" She shivered, as her head sank on my bosom; and her large, dilating eyes turned full on mine, as though they would grasp at once my tardy secret, and leave the tongue at fault forever. That pale, pale face, with its thin inflated nostril, and tremulous red lips — how sweet and sad it was! and those eager, earnest, asking eyes, which never moved from mine all the while I was leading her to a seat, and gathering her more closely to

my heart, as though nothing should ever part us more — how full of love and light and lustre!

"Coralie, my heart's darling, your intuitions were true; you are *not* the niece of Madame Lesueur," I said.

"Oh! Henri, can it be that you — tell me truth? Ah! blessed, blessed truth! But — how I hoped for it — prayed for it! *Not* her niece, you say — oh, joy! — tell it me again and again."

"No, my dearest, not one drop of kindred blood runs in her veins and yours; you two are as widely separated as even you and I."

"Thank Heaven! oh, so joyfully — so gratefully!" she cried, and glad tears suffused her lustrous eyes, only to make them more brightly beautiful. "And now I am free! *Free!* — do you hear it, Henri? Now I can go; I'm free to work, to toil, to struggle, if need be, with poverty and loneliness; but free — freed forever from temptation, ruin, and shame! Thank Heaven! thank the sweet Spirit-Mother! But more; let me hear more, *mon ami.* Tell me of my own mother, and of the picture. I'm waiting, Henri!"

Fondly I drew the young, excited creature to my side, and in low, murmured tones, I repeated her brief history, as I had gathered it, not an hour since, from the lips of Madame Lesueur. At first her beautiful face was raised to mine, drinking in, as it were, each word as it fell; but gradually as I proceeded, the stately head drooped lower and lower, and when I concluded by acknowledging that we knew nothing whatever of the original of the picture, her hands, which I held locked in mine, had grown icy cold; and, as with a low, heart-crushing moan, came the single word, "*Betrayed!*" she fell forward upon my shoulder, motionless, to all appearance as lifeless as the clay. In an instant I had caught her up, but she fell back,

white and rigid. She had quite fainted away. The long struggle in her heart, and the depth of mortification and wounded feeling at finding herself, at last, the child of penury and shame — without relatives, without a home, without a name, even — standing utterly alone, had overcome her. And I could not wonder at it. Poor child! She was a delicately organized creature — like her mother, I presume, whom woes and wrong and wretchedness had driven almost (perhaps altogether) mad. But what should I do? Ring for assistance and call in the servants? Nay, that would *never* do; the entire *salon* might pour in upon us. Send for Madame Lesueur? Not so; she was now in company with Berthêl; and what if he were to come also? I searched the tables for a water-pitcher — the *étagère* for a flask of perfume or spirits; I could see nothing of the kind. I laid my precious burden down upon the sofa, with her head as low as possible; then darting to the console, where stood a vase of rare exotics, I threw them out upon the marble, and, kneeling by the fair girl, bathed her face with the water, (not *very* fresh, it must be confessed — at least, not cold enough to be immediately beneficial,) and chafed her rigid hands, all the while praying that a nature so pure, so true, so innocent, so like a broken ray struck off from the divine beauty, might never be left to lose itself in the dark void of moral gloom which had so long surrounded it. How long I knelt, and wrought, and prayed thus, I know not. I was aroused by the sound of footsteps approaching along the hall — a man's footsteps; and instantly I sprang to the door, intending to turn the key, lest some one should intrude upon us. My hand was upon the lock — just one moment too late; the door opened; I caught a glimpse of a man passing out, and Madame Lesueur entered. The man was Berthêl, of course; and now, thank all my stars! he was gone. Well

disciplined as Madame Lesueur was by her strong self-command, her face was a study for the few brief moments in which she confronted me, after the first glance at Coralie, apparently lifeless, on the sofa, and the vase overturned upon the rich carpet. Anger, astonishment, and grief were all there. Her eyes blazed over me an instant, then she rushed forward, exclaiming, "*Dieu du ciel! ma mignonne! ma Coralie! elle est morte!*"

"No, madame; she is not dead — only insensible. She could not bear to hear what you have told me to-night. Help me to recover her, quick! What must be done?"

"*Pauvre enfant!*" sighed the woman, as she brushed by me, and left the room. At that moment Coralie opened her eyes, met mine, and closed them again, with an expression of pain. It was but a minute when Madame Lesueur returned with restoratives, under the influence of which our pallid *protégée* soon recovered sufficiently to sit up, leaning back on the luxurious cushions. A glass of wine revived her, and Madame sat by her side holding her hands.

"*Je suis outré de douleur* — we ought not to have told her; I knew it was too soon," remarked the woman to me.

"Ah! madame," murmured the fair girl, in low, tremulous tones, as soon as she found voice to speak, "did she leave no sign; no word for me, her poor, lone baby?" We understood at once that it was of her mother she spoke.

"No, *petite mignonne*," was the reply. "Your mother had no time to talk; she was a dying woman when she entered my door. Once, during that night — and she was almost gone then — I sat by her, crying over my dead baby — it had just died: she feebly held out her arms and said, 'Give *me* the babe?' I rose and placed it by her side. She strove to gather it up to her bosom, and then

she looked at me, and said, with *such* a smile — *helas!* it was sadder far than all the tears I shed: 'We shall sleep well, your babe and I.' And then she asked his name. 'Etienne,' I said. She pointed to you, her own babe — you lay asleep at the foot of the bed where she was lying — and said, 'Let me kiss her, please?' I carried you to her; she kissed you as you slept, and whispered — for she was going fast, poor lady: 'Take her for me; her name is Coralie. I am going where *he* has already gone; *he* is waiting — I must — ' and then she said no more, for she lost speech forever. Soon her wide-open blue eyes, the eyes of the dead, were staring at me, there in the night and the silence. I closed them down, and said, 'May the good God take her and my baby!' for I believed in a good God then. I had not forgotten *all* my own poor mother's teachings. I could not know whom she meant when she said, 'I am going where *he* has gone.' It might have been my dead boy, or it might have been the youth whose picture I afterward found on her bosom. And, on the whole, I have thought it most probable that this was the real state of the case — that the picture is that of her husband, your father, *ma Coralie;* and that he died, or was killed in some dreadful way; and so she lost her senses partially, and wandered away, no one knew whither. This view is more probable from the fact that no inquiries were ever made concerning her, that I heard of. This is only conjecture, *ma petite,* but I think it very probable that it may also be truth."

"Yes — yes, you are doubtless right, madame," I exclaimed. Especially did I desire that Coralie, for the sake of her own peace of mind, should take this view of the case. "It is the only interpretation of the circumstances which seems at all plausible — the only one that seems reasonable," I said, decidedly. Coralie, who was weeping

bitterly, caught the hands of Madame Lesueur, and pressing them to her heart, said, in broken tones:

"Ah! Madame Elise, how much do I owe you! Do not condemn me as ungrateful, when I say I must leave you. I shall die if I remain here. You must let me go: and oh! you ought to be glad to send me away. In justice to the creature for whom you have done so much, you must do still more — give me freedom! Tell me to go, and work for honest bread. Allow me still to love you — still to respect myself. When — when, dear Madame Elise, will you say to me, '*You are free*'?"

I joined my entreaties to those of the lovely supplicant, urging the matter earnestly and eloquently — for my whole soul was in her cause; but the Madame, though much agitated, shook her head.

"Wait — wait awhile, *mes enfans;* in time it shall be as you desire. Where could you go, *ma Coralie?* At present, you have no other home than mine. Be happy, and rest assured I will endeavor to find a better home for you."

"She could go with me at once, madame," I said, confidently. She smiled, in the old disagreeable way: "*That* would not be mending the matter, monsieur," she replied, in a tone that seemed to say, "She had a great deal better be with me, even *here*, than with *you*, anywhere." "But," she added, "it grows late, and you must now retire, Monsieur d'Herbelot. *Ma pauvre petite* is weary — has had too much excitement already. The *salon* is deserted; and Monsieur Berthêl left some time ago — just as I came in and found you *dead* here, Coralie. Monsieur, if you will come to-morrow evening at eight o'clock, I shall be disengaged, and we will examine into our affairs more thoroughly: we will exchange opinions, and come to some definite understanding concerning the future of *ma mignonne*, who is so anx-

ious to leave me. You will then, perhaps, be more ready, sir, to speak to me of your residence, family connections, etc. I will never — never allow this child to enter any family, save one that possesses enough of true 'honor' to treat her honorably. Will eight o'clock, to-morrow evening, suit you, monsieur?"

"Admirably — any hour will suit me. I shall certainly await your pleasure, madame," I replied.

"But, why wait until to-morrow evening?" suggested Coralie, timidly. "At eleven in the morning is better — we rarely have visitors at that hour: and even Monsieur Berthêl, who comes at any time almost, scarcely ever honors us so early in the day."

I caught, at once, at the suggestion — divining, readily, that she wished me to come when it was more than probable I should miss Berthêl; and, as that was also my earnest desire, I said, "Willingly: let it be at eleven — provided, only, that madame will be disengaged at that hour." She consented to this arrangement, and I rose to take my leave. I shook hands in a very amicable manner with the "hostess;" and as I touched with my lips the fair child's brow of Coralie, she whispered, "Do not leave me long — oh! not long: I shall watch for you at eleven; do not forget it."

"*Forget it!*" when the full gaze of those large, luminous eyes, with the pathetic expression of appealing sadness and mournful hopefulness lingers until this very hour within my memory? Pressing her little hand, in assurance that I would not fail, and in answer to her softly spoken "good-by," I turned, and left the apartment.

CHAPTER XIII.

IN THE TOILS.

I labored on alone. The wind and dust
And sun of the world beat blinding in my face;
And hopes, now for me, now against me, dragged
My spirit onward; as some fallen balloon
Which, whether caught by blossoming trees, or bare,
Is torn alike.

AURORA LEIGH.

Round her life the Demon's power
Like a serpent closely twineth;
He breathes his breath upon her cheek —
She shudders, yet she dare not shriek;
Virgin! save her in that hour!
Oh! his fiendish eye divineth
That her heart is nigh to break;
O'er her forehead fair it shineth;
His the eye so like the snake.

OLD LEGEND.

THE hall was quite deserted when I entered it: not even a servant in waiting occupied his post near the stairway. Mechanically, I put my hand up to my vest-pocket for my watch, that I might see the hour as I passed under the lamp; then, suddenly recollecting that it had changed owners, I hurried on through the vestibule, and down the steps — as I did so, placing my hand upon my breast to ascertain whether my little guardian, which Madame Lesueur had stigmatized as "too noisy," were safe. It was gone! Fool that I was! I had left it lying on the table, where I had been conversing with the "hostess." There had been

such a whirl in my brain during the whole of this eventful evening, that if I had lost my head instead of my pistol, it could scarcely be wondered at. I would go back and secure it. I turned to do so, but just on the instant became aware of the presence of some person on the opposite side of the entrance, down upon the pavement, which I judged was some one about entering the house. Not wishing to meet any one *there*, I turned again, saying to myself, "I 'll get it to-morrow," then dashed forward through the only half-lighted streets, threading my way as best I might toward my home. When some two squares distant from the "Maison des Bijoux," just as I was passing round a street corner — I know not what caused the impulse — but I had a sense of *something* coming through the dark, behind me. It was an intuition, such as we sometimes feel in moments of *real* impending danger; and also partook of that nameless fear we have ofttimes felt as children, when we go hurrying along a dark corridor, dreading gaunt, fiery eyes which we seem *to know* are glaring behind us; almost feeling the hot breath of some horrible pursuer sweep against our blanching cheeks. It was a feeling and a dread something like these which prompted me to look back, as I turned that corner. I looked and saw — yes, it was true — I saw that same dark figure of a man following me at a rapid pace! I hurried on. Fear lent me wings; in the darkened spaces between the lamps, I almost flew. Once again I turned; the figure was following still — nearing me, and coming on rapidly. As I hastened forward it came over me like a flash — I have no arms, and this fellow will most probably accost me with: "Your money or your life!" I renewed my speed, and made a desperate dash for one of the principal thoroughfares, believing that I should find it less deserted and better lighted, consequently more safe for me. I gained it; and,

when I had gone some two or three squares, turned. I saw nothing of my pursuer. The street was tolerably well lighted, but there were but few persons passing, and those few seemed belated travellers like myself, hurrying homeward. Coming into a shaded spot, where a lamp had gone out, I leaned up against the post to recover myself a little. I was trembling; my heart beat loudly in my bosom with rapid, heavy throbbings, and I was so greatly unnerved that it seemed to me, for a few moments, I could go no farther. I even thought of stopping in at some saloon or restaurant, (not being near any of the principal hotels,) and remaining there until day-dawn at least, when more people would be abroad, and the danger of robbery lessened. All at once I broke into a laugh: of what did I expect to be robbed? I, who had not one cent of money on my person; no watch, no jewels, save a small diamond pin in my shirt-bosom (and which I wondered now that Madame Lesueur did not seize upon with the rest of my "availables") — nothing at all, save the little switch of whalebone, called per compliment a "cane," which I carried in my hand. "How very foolish!" I said to myself, now that I had time to think calmly. "Of what am I afraid? Of some chance pedestrian, honest enough, no doubt, who was hurrying homeward like myself, whose path has now diverged from mine, and I see him no more? And *this* my womanish fears have manufactured into a desperado, demanding, in his cut-throat whisper, 'Your money or your life.' Verily, Monsieur d'Herbelot, thou art a cavalier of marvellous courage! How Sigismond would laugh at thy 'hair-breadth escapes,' and astounding adventures!" I really felt quite ashamed of my silly panic, as I again started forward on my homeward way. If this was the best I could do, I had better leave off affecting to protect Coralie, and remain indoors for the re-

mainder of my life, behind bolt and bar. I paused again a moment to fully decide where I was. Recognizing the buildings, I saw that I was not very far from home, though out of the usual way somewhat. I had gone too far down town to be able, without retracing my steps, to take the back street by which I could gain the garden and the private stairway, where I felt assured that even now Ninon was awaiting me. Rather than retrace my steps, I would go on about three and a half blocks, and thus reach home by the front gateway. There was no alternative, for I would not go back; besides, what difference did it make? I could as easily go round the house to the back stairway as reach it by the garden. It was deep in the night — no one would discover me going in. I walked on rapidly, until only one street and half a square lay between me and my home-haven. I sprang lightly over the last crossing, turned a corner, and — great Heaven! *there* — right there under the street-lamp, stood, as if awaiting me, that same dark figure which had dogged my footsteps from the "Maison des Bijoux!" It lifted the slouched hat a moment as it mockingly uttered, "*Bon soir*, Monsieur d'Herbelot!" and I met, with a shudder of recoil, the fierce, vindictive, passion-drunken eyes of — Jules Berthêl!

That look of his — how it stung me! All the proud blood of the old D'Herbelots rushed into my face as he pronounced that noble name in such a mocking, taunting — nay, insulting tone. I could have ground him to powder under my heel like a venomous worm! Confronting there in that lonely place, at that lonely hour, the man I detested for his vices — the man whom, perhaps, I had good reason to fear for his vindictive nature and unscrupulous wickedness — the man whom I knew to be my bitter enemy — it was strange that no feeling of fear came over me. All my former childish tremors were gone: I knew not

whither. I *saw* my enemy — measured his strength and my own — and though my hands grew numb, though my heart throbbed thick and fast, it was not with fear. It was no longer a haunting dread of that uncertain *something* behind me. I had my enemy where I could look him in the eyes, and indignation was the prevailing feeling in my heart — not fear. In the brief space in which I stood there, face to face with my foe, I could not but note the great change which had written itself deeply upon him since last I saw him at my father's house. I thought of what Ninon had remarked, "But then he is so different now." He was but the wreck of what he had been one short year ago. During that time he had gloried in the title of a "fast youth;" and verily he had gone down the broad road at a rapid pace. A glance revealed to me the vice-worn victim of his uncontrolled passions — drink and dissipation were fast bringing down upon him the last of their dread trio — Death. At present, he was "flown with wine;" or, more probably, with some of the more potent poisons which are dealt out from the thousand "saloons" and "bars" of the Crescent City — nay, *every* American city; more's the pity — more's the shame! As I have said, I took in all this at a glance; it was plain enough under the falling lamplight; and ere the hot flush of indignation had dimmed upon my cheek, with the haughty prompting of the old imperious blood which raged along my young veins I exclaimed, "Out of my way, sirrah; stand aside — let a gentleman pass!"

"*A gentleman! ha! ha! ha! — a gentleman!*" It was not much; that is to say, the words were only such as any half-drunken wretch might have used tauntingly to a known superior; but it was the tone that startled me. There was that in the accent of this little sentence as it was hissed upon my ear, which, like the warning rattle of the

roused snake, instantly sent the hot blood curdling back about my heart. Then, peering straight into my face with a maudlin leer, as loathsome as it was malicious — and which made my very fingers ache and tingle in their impatience to smite out those insolent eyes — he continued, "But first, young *gentleman*, before you are permitted to pass on, I have a little 'confidence' for your private ear. You know me, I suppose."

"I have no desire to know you. Stand out of my way, sir, and allow me to pass; or I shall summon those who will force you to it."

"Not know me? You don't trouble yourself to 'hold fast the truth,' good Monsieur d'Herbelot. You lie with a pretty good grace — a grace which bespeaks an adept in the art. Don't know me, eh? — devilish fine joke that — don't know *me?*" and he drew himself up, thrust his passion-harrowed face close to mine, and hissed — "*But I know you!*"

I started back a pace or two — then recovering myself instantly, I retorted, "False as foul! *You* know me? I cannot stand here parleying with a poor, drunken, fallen creature. I pity you — but, stand back, and let me pass; or as I said, I will —"

"No!" he broke in — "no, *you won't* call in the good police. Better not — better not; and you know it, too. I'm a 'poor, fallen creature,' am I? Perhaps not more so than yourself — not so much, possibly — seeing I did n't have so far to fall. 'Fallen,' am I? But when a young lady — *lady*, mind you! — beautiful, accomplished, high in fashion, rich, and of noble blood, and in the absence of her affianced husband, frequents, at such hours as this, an establishment like the 'Maison des Bijoux' — we may well cry out in saintly horror, 'Ah! what a falling off was there!' And *you* have done this, mademoiselle. I

know you well; I have cause to remember you; you are the only woman I have ever really loved — you are my soul-slayer, the haughty heiress, Henriette de Hauterive! Aha! *Je vous y prends!*"

Had the firm earth opened at my feet, I could scarce have been more astounded. Like a thunderbolt his words came crushing in upon my senses, with a stunning, stupefying force. For a moment, I felt as if buried in an avalanche of ice; but pride and anger quickly scourged me back to life again; and I dropped out from firm lips, haughtily and slowly, the few words, "You have strangely mistaken the person, sir; I have the honor *not* to understand you."

"Then I shall have the profound pleasure of making myself intelligible, mademoiselle, or monsieur — which you choose. You will greatly oblige me by glancing at this trifle;" and up into the lamplight he held *my watch*, with its diamond setting and long, peculiar, sharp-linked chain! "This," he continued — almost calmly now, for the effect of his potations seemed wearing off — "this, I say, was left by you in the hands of the mistress of that house this very night; and behold!" He touched the back spring — the case flew open, and there upon the inside shone, as in letters of fire, *my name* — HENRIETTE DE HAUTERIVE, *New Orleans, La., June* 1*st*, 1850.

Oh! fool! fool, and blind! to have forgotten *that* glittering betrayer! I stood as one blasted by the lightning-stroke; and he went on:

"*There is the proof*, mademoiselle — proof, dark and damning. Confess now, my pretty pleasure-bird, that you are in the toils. I've been watching you; and not in vain, as this proves. Had n't you as well come to terms with me? Proud beauty — and so you scorned *me*, only to throw yourself into the vortex of a life like that — a life —"

"Stop there! just there!" I cried, white with passion — choking with rage and scorn; for his vile insinuations stung me well-nigh to madness. "Stop there — once for all. Deep villain that you are, Berthêl, and despicable as deep, *you know* my purpose in going to that house was one of which Honor's self could never, never be ashamed — one that Virtue's self would not disown."

"Ah! and is it so?" he sneered. "Then all I have to say, is that Mesdames Honor and Virtue are much easier moralists than even I had given them credit for. Perhaps you 're right, mademoiselle; for myself, I don't pretend to know a great deal about those mysterious females whom you call Virtue and Honor. And — if the naked truth must be confessed — your actions rather report that *your* acquaintance with them is slight, also. A young woman who visits the 'Maison des Bijoux' at so late an hour as you seem to choose; who goes in disguise; who appears to appreciate the old proverb, 'When the cat is away the mice will play,' (beg your pardon — no offence to M. Sauvollée;) and who can leave with the honorable 'hostess' several hundred dollars and a jewelled watch as 'hush-money' — why — why, you will observe, the inference is quite plain, my vestal votaress. Of course, your purpose was an 'honorable' one; but, it looks — *otherwise;* don't it, my bird of Paradise? Your mission 'honorable'? That is taken for granted — by myself. But, look at who you are, and where you stand at this moment, and grant at least that — *c'est un phénomène que de vous voir ici.* I, who love you, am able to comprehend this miracle; but the world —"

Forgetting myself, in my mad rage, I here raised the little switch cane to strike him in the face: his tone of insulting familiarity carried me beyond all bounds. Oh! (I thought,) oh! for that little pistol I so carelessly left be-

hind — that I might send a death-messenger through his coward heart!" He caught the cane as it descended, wrenching it from my hand in the act of striking; but, in a moment more, smiled approvingly, bowed, and, with mock courtesy, presenting it again, said:

"*Excusez moi:* you were about to drop your pretty plaything in the — wrong place! I have the honor to regain it for you. I am penetrated with admiration *pour votre presence d'esprit.* But, one word of advice. When you feel disposed to play the gentleman, something of this sort would be better — I advise you to patronize an institution of this kind;" and here he drew from his bosom the bright, keen bowie-blade which Madame Lesueur had worn earlier in the evening.

I was sure it was the same — the chain was still attached to the sheath. My heart seemed to fail me — my soul to grow sick. Could it be that I was the victim of a conspiracy? Had she given him that knife on purpose? *Ah, Dieu!* how many mistakes I had committed! Sigismond, Sigismond! if you could see me now! What a rash, headlong course I had pursued — rushing blindfold into the toils which were now netted round me. Great God of purity and truth, of justice and mercy, whither shall I fly for help? To *Thee!* to *Thee!* And in my agonized extremity, my very soul went forth upon that smothered cry, "God in heaven, help me!"

"Why, of course," uttered my tormentor, with a sinister sneer; "now is the time to call *Him* in! If *He* can't 'help' you, it is not probable that anybody will. Those blind bats — the good-natured police — can't be made our confidants; the news of our little private *affaire de guerre,* or *de cœur,* (as you choose,) would soon fly into the journals — consequently, throughout the country, as you are aware. Think of it, mademoiselle! 'Astonishing devel-

opments in high life!' What a godsend to the city reporters! Take my advice, and don't give them an opportunity to use their eloquent pens at your expense. *Tenez vous en repos*, my beautiful *peine du cœur!*"

It would be impossible for one to express in words the cool malignity, the insolent familiarity and caustic irony with which he said this; and his glowing eyes, which dwelt upon my face as if riveted there, were intolerable. There was a something in them to which no words that I can use will give expression; a something that maddened me beyond all else. Surely, as I have a soul to be saved, had it been possible, I must have killed him there, even had the penalty been the loss of that soul for evermore!

"But," he resumed, after a brief pause, and moving rather from the front, (for he had been opposing my way all this time,) "let us to business. *Je ne suis pas venu ici pour enfiler des perles;* and, as I before mentioned, we must come to terms, my pleasure-bird. Of course I have not sought your company at this time for nothing; of course I would not detain a lady thus in the open streets, at this hour of night, merely to assure her that I had the honor of knowing who she was, and what place of pious amusement she had been attending this summer Sunday evening. Not at all; there is still too much of the *preux chevalier* about me for that. Therefore I must explain. Mademoiselle, *entre nous*, you are now aware of the position you occupy—a *very* honorable one, no doubt. You see the net in which you have (at your own sweet will) enveloped yourself; and you cannot blame me, if I, knowing your position also, should be emboldened to take advantage of it. You may remember what passed between us at our last stormy meeting, in your father's house; and, believe me, *I* have not forgotten it. We meet to-night on very different ground. Then you were the proud beauty, the haughty heiress, the

spoiled child of pride and fashion, and I was at your feet; *now* — you are — I'll not say what, at present. Suffice it to say, you are *in my power.* One word, one breath of mine, and your fair reputation is blackened forever; your social position lost; your name a by-word on the streets; and your affianced lover — *then* what of him? Reflect. To such as you, a 'character' is *une chose de prix.* The world regards you as being possessed of one. Shall I *lever le masque,* and reveal how you stand? *Raillerie apart,* I trust you now appreciate my words, when I tell you that 'the tide has turned' in my favor. Do you see where you stand, pretty one? Is it not

'. . . . . on slippery rocks
Where fiery billows roll below —'

as those very respectable parsons say, when dealing so liberally in Pandemonium pyrotechnics that an honest sinner like myself is led to wonder how they keep up the weekly supply? Again, I ask, do you see where you stand — *ma belle sorcière?*"

"Yes, I see it — I stand here parleying with the foul Fiend himself — more shame to me!" and at the word I broke past him and fled forward along the pave toward my home. It was not far: oh! Heaven aid me to reach it — to gain the safe haven of my home once more! A deep, grating curse followed me. On I fled, but my pitiless pursuer's footfalls echoed closely on my flying steps. Every instant I seemed to feel his heavy hand upon my shoulder, as though he would fell me to the earth. A few moments, and I had bounded over the second and last cross alley-way; my feet touched the broad pavement that ran in front of the yard before my own dwelling; I saw the iron gate with its lion-heads and ornamental lamp in front, and felt that I had gained it. Alas for me! my good housekeeper,

Mrs. McIlvaine, proved my bane. According to her orders, (which were of the Medo-Persian species,) Pierre every evening sprinkled that dusty pavement liberally, and the slippery flagstones now rendered my footing very uncertain. Twice I slipped, caught myself, and sprang forward again; but just as I was within half a dozen paces of the gate, already stretching out my hand to grasp and swing it open, my boot, with its awkward heel, (ladies were not accustomed to heels at that time,) turned upon the treacherous side-walk, and I fell forward, only saving myself from severe injury by falling upon the outstretched arm by which I had hoped to grasp the desired goal. I rose instantly, half-stunned — but just *that moment too late;* for there, between me and the gateway — between me and my home, stood my relentless torturer; who, as I rose, held out his hand, as if to aid me, and said, with a mocking smile, "Shall I have the honor to assist you — *belle dêesse?* I warned you that you stood on 'slippery rocks' — you disregarded my admonition, and you have fallen. I trust you will perceive 'the moral' of the accident, and — *beware, for the future.*"

CHAPTER XIV.

AT BAY.

Thou laugh'st, tormentor — what? thou 'lt brand *my* name?
Do — do — in vain — he 'll not believe my shame —
He knows me true — that nought beneath God's sky
Could tempt or change me . . . .

Hold!
Tempt not my rage — by Heaven not half so bold
The puny bird that dares with teasing hum
Within the crocodile's stretched jaws to come!

Thou 'lt fly? as easily may reptiles run
The gaunt snake once has fixed his eyes upon;
As easily, when caught, the prey may be
Plucked from his loving folds — as thou from me!

THE VEILED PROPHET.

THE lamp just opposite my own gateway — my *home* lamp, now growing somewhat dim as the night waned on — shone softly over that dark face before me; the brow ploughed by evil thoughts, the blanched and sunken cheeks, the lips writhing and quivering in the vain effort to give expression to all the powerful passions that were seething in the hot heart below, and the deep, cavernous eyes, "set on fire of hell." One slender hand, white and delicate as a woman's, held my watch, the brilliant sparkles flashing out ever and anon in the lamplight, while the chain was twisted round his fingers, and the other hand lay upon the fastening of the gate. My fall had lost to me the brief space in which I might have passed that barrier

and waved a triumphant farewell to my persecutor from the safe haven of the home side; but now a double barrier interposed, and escape, for the time, was out of the question. I felt that I was foiled: still, the very sight of home gave me courage. Late as it was, I knew that Ninette was even now on the alert, somewhere about the place, waiting for my return; and if matters outside the gate were such as to justify a call, my voice could be heard at the house, and Ninon would speedily answer. Looking boldly up into the dark face that was more boldly glooming down upon mine, I said, with all the firmness I could command, "Once more, sir, I ask you to stand aside and allow me to pass. This is my home; the hour is late; why should you detain me thus?"

"Why, indeed? Simply because it is my good pleasure to do so. You are not loquacious, but I like to talk to you, my beautiful *ange dêchu.* I have now the happiness to address you *de vive voix:* when have I enjoyed that pleasure before? when shall I again? This is my opportunity; therefore I 'detain you thus.' I hold, that when a man can have the society of a charming woman, he is a fool if he prefers his own solitary meditations; and upon that same principle I 'detain you,' and shall continue to do so, if necessary *à force de bras.* True, the hour is late. It is time, certainly, that all 'fair and honorable' ladies should be safely housed at home; but, when we take to masquerading, we must not shiver at the midnight air, or expect *être sujet au coup de cloche,* you know." His words fell slowly, like iceflakes; but I knew they came from a heart which was boiling with rage at my attempt to escape him.

"Unless you allow me to pass that gate, sir, I shall be obliged to call for assistance from the house," I said.

"I don't know that I should at all object to that," he

answered, in his mocking tones. "Do, if you please. We shall have a grand *tableau vivant.* Shrieks heard in the dead of night — maid and man, cook and coachman rush out; young mistress discovered in the streets in masculine attire; *mon père* demands explanations; 'startling developments,' (or, *devil-up*-ments — excuse the pun, fair lady,) — ah! it would be charming — *nouvelle — unique!* I insist that you get up something of the kind immediately, really. For once, oblige me, *belle ange.*"

He was becoming sobered; and it is utterly beyond me to describe the combination of satanic coolness and savage force with which these words were spoken. Frost and fire they were — pointed and energized by the fierce animus within. I saw there was no sense in "fighting fate" at present: I would be as cool (apparently) as my tormentor feigned to be. Come what would, I was *almost* at home; and though I could not see the lights in my own room, for the closed curtains and shutters, I knew that the lights were there. I stepped back, leaned up against the iron column which supported the lamp, folded my arms so as to support the one upon which I had fallen, (for it was paining me severely,) and, with a calm eye, looked my mocking enemy steadily in the face.

"Ha! ha!" he laughed, low and bitterly; "I like that — I do, by Juno! Now that you see you are hemmed in, that you are foiled, that you can't escape me — you throw yourself back *en grande tenue,* as if to say, 'Now fire away and do your d—dest!' Pardon me, I never swear in the presence of ladies: it's apt to shock their sensibilities. Ah! mademoiselle, you don't imagine how you make me love you, with that haughty, hands-off and down-to-the-devil way you have — it's supremely captivating. Would become you much better, however, in your own proper costume. Curse that infernal toggery! How can a reason-

able fellow make love to anything in the shape of *a man?* When a sensible man is inclined *faire l'amour*, he inevitably prefers the demoiselles. *N'est ce pas, monsieur?*" After a short pause, during which he glowered down upon me as if to fathom the deeps of my indignation and impatience, but failed, he continued: "By that slight smile of contempt, I perceive you think I am trifling: well, if you will only condescend to say so, we 'll turn to some graver subject. Shall we, *ma chère?* It shall be precisely as you say."

I made no reply, but watched him steadily; I was watching until he should, perhaps, forget to hold the gate against me.

"*Morbleu!*" he exclaimed again. "Wish I had n't praised you so much for the 'grand, gloomy, and peculiar' manner in which you do the statuesque. A woman loves the free use of her tongue, but she loves admiration better. It 's not that she loves 'Cæsar less, but Rome more;' you understand. You are a Zenobia in primrose kids and white vest, as I 've a soul to be eternally d—d—I should say, disquieted! *Don't* look so, queen of hearts! you absolutely consume me!"

If he intended, as I believed, to provoke me into some reply, he was disappointed. I watched him narrowly, but I had no intention of again committing myself by speaking to him. After a while, he resumed, ironically: "I see that you are not disposed to oblige me — how unkind of you! That silence wounds me deeply — *cela me tient a cœur.* But, if you are determined not to speak, you can't help listening; and I wish you to give me your undivided attention. I pray you to be *sur le qui vive.* Possibly, I have tormented you sufficiently. Ah! don't smile in that contemptuous way: I *know* I have vexed and angered you. Such was my intention. This was all trifling — let it pass. I am in earnest now — my very soul (if I have

one) is in what I am about to say to you. *Ecoutez!* First of all, I am your rejected lover — I do not mince matters, you see. Secondly, I love you still — please to remember *that.* I love you wholly; perhaps, solely. This love, which was such a cross to you, doubtless you have deemed it long since buried deep *dans le fleuve d'Oubli.* No! it is still the *feu d'enfer* which consumes me! Your beauty; your proud, free spirit; your noble name; your princely fortune — I love them all; and they constitute — *yourself.* Banished from your presence, the keen eyes of jealous passion have watched you from afar. During the past year, you have appeared in public but seldom that I have not seen you. At the Opera, on the promenade — even in the church, at times, I have been near you. Though you knew it not, I saw you upon your first visit to the house our fellows call the 'Maison des Bijoux;' you were in company with the man who is said to be your affianced husband. What brought *you* to that place I could not then divine. I have since learned, by using my own eyes and those of servants — eyes proverbially keen, as you are aware — that some romantic fancy, which you had taken to pretty Coralie Lesueur, led you there. Let your purpose be what it might, I, at once, acquitted you of all thought of wrong. I was satisfied that you had a purpose, and a good one, or M. Sauvollée would not have brought you there. Again, I saw you with Coralie Lesueur, in the old Place d'Armes. You may think it strange that I should have penetrated your disguise at once — that I should know you *d'un premier coup d'oeil.* Not at all strange: 'Love is blind,' they say; but, I tell you, Love has the eye of an eagle — shadow or sunlight, it is one to him. Love would lead me to Henriette de Hauterive under any maskings she might choose to wear. When I saw you making love to Coralie, in the shades of the old

Plaza, (for I *did* see you — no matter how,) I thought I divined your purpose: you had become interested in the girl, (and she *is* interesting, I confess,) and probably, in the guise of a young lover, sought to woo and win her away from her present associations. Highly romantic idea! and, if it could be carried out, one might call it reasonable also. But — I should not wish to be in your position when the hour comes for you to lift your mask. To proceed: I knew of Monsieur Sauvollée's departure for the country — know very nearly the time set for his return; and I supposed you would appear no more in your new *rôle* until he came — he who, it seems, is your shadow. I was therefore not prepared to find you to-night at the house of Lesueur. Not knowing what to do with myself until your *fiancé's* return — for the weather is as hot as if stirred up by the lord of fire and brimstone himself — I consented to take a run up to the Wells, with Mowbray, for a few days — if I could raise 'the wherewithal.' Accordingly, I took him round to see that regal *belle Marguerite*, while I called on Lesueur for money. I've oppressed that woman, I expect; she melts money in that extravagant house she keeps, as if it were a crucible; but, when a fellow is literally 'played out,' and the 'tiger' has his fist for many thousands more than he is worth, what's to be done? Why, get it honorably, if you can; but, if not — *get it.* And so, when I'm 'hard up' — which happens oftener than pleases me — money I must have, if I win it *à la pointe de l'épée.* Without it, how am I to live? *Enseignez-moi le chemin, s'il vous plait.* There is no way now open to me, save to put the screws upon Lady Lesueur: I'm obliged to do it in self-defence. Luckily, I've found out what spring to touch, when I want the indispensable, in that quarter. Maybe *you* would like to know what it is? I have only to press it firmly, when, presto! from some secret

reservoir or other, up comes 'the needful.' Can't you signify that you would be pleased to know?" He glowered down upon me as I stood in stolid silence.

"*Parlez!*" he burst out, with impatient energy; "can't you speak? Say it 's hot, or cold — say — anything at all — but say something! Speak! if only *par moquerie! Que prêtendez-vous?*" Still I stood watching him with haughty, half-contemptuous patience.

"You won't talk?" he resumed, and his eye gleamed with an angry fire; "well, I must talk myself, then. The money-spring I spoke of is — the pretty Coralie!" I started — visibly: to have saved my life, I think, I could not have helped it. I struggled hard to appear utterly indifferent — to keep up an unbroken, outward calm; but he read agitation in my telltale face, and those glittering, eager eyes seemed to gloat over the knowledge that he had moved me at last.

"*Mille pardons!*" he said, with his mocking, sinister smile; "I did not mean to disturb your equanimity, fair *montagne de glace;* I am merely relating my experiences — *c'est tout.* Don't agitate yourself, I entreat. I only meant to say that I have found it convenient to pretend a terrific grand passion for the pretty niece — to insist upon possessing beauty instead of booty — then the golden shower is sure to come. Lesueur would never pay one stiver of my dues if I did n't manage her in some such way. No use to sell her up — all that she has would n't pay her indebtedness, and I don't want that property back on my hands. What I want is ready money. So I know how to manage the Madame, cunning as she is. She has one especial weak point, and I have taken advantage of it. I amuse myself swearing by all the hot-hearted *dieux d'enfer* that I will have her pet, *quoi qu'il arrive;* and then to see how she struggles for 'the wherewithal' to meet my

demands! I verily believe she would cut off her own fingers to get the diamonds thereon for me, (if they were real, and if she had no other way in which to get up the all-important circulating medium,) rather than give me the little plaything I don't want at all! It is really almost too absurd to laugh at! Coralie, bah! The girl is well enough, but not *my* style. *Cette femme fait bien la rêservée;* and I hate prudes. She is milk and water. Marguerite, now, is *eau de vie,* with a fair sprinkling of the devil to spice it off withal. I admire women of that volcanic type—hence my admiration for *you,* my charming friend! But my little *ruse,* though so absurd in itself, always 'scared up' the money; 't was a good joke—a deuced fine joke; so clever and successful that I am tempted to believe it was suggested to me by the cunning old Sorcerer himself—if indeed there be such a clever personage."

"You may rest assured as to the author of the suggestion—possibly, however, *you* could become *his* teacher," I broke in, forgetting myself in my utter loathing of the man's mean and cowardly villany."

"Aha! and so you *can* speak!" he cried, with a gleam of satisfaction in his wild eyes. He exulted in having wrung a few words from my lips; and could not forbear to taunt me in return. "I 'm glad you have spoken at last," he added; "although *ce que vous dites n' pas le sens commun:* I feared I was on the point of discovering that *rara avis,* a silent woman—a notoriety which I should never be able to sustain with becoming dignity. Let us get to business. If you go on interrupting me in this unceremonious manner, mademoiselle, I shall never come to the *crème de la crème* of my story."

I was growing extremely weary of this running fire of taunts and trifling; my arm ached from the wrist to the

shoulder, and I *felt* the night growing deeper as the lamp above me burned dimmer. However, I longed to hear all he had to say: it was to my interest to discover, if possible, whether there was any collusion between him and Madame Lesueur; besides, I could not get away—the gate was still closely guarded. I therefore stood up stiffly in my position — again in determined silence. Meanwhile, my dark-browed enemy went on: "As I said before, I did not dream of *you* being in the 'Maison' to-night, when I went there to 'scare up' some of the can't-do-without-able. I roused up the old lady so fiercely that I knew, if I would wait awhile, she would conjure up the gold from *somewhere;* and I meant to have it if she brought it red hot from h— Hades. I went into the *salon*, for a change. Wearying of this at length, for *la belle* Marguerite was splendidly spiteful to me, I rose to go. Mowbray concluded to go with me; but just as we came out, we were met in the hall by the Lesueur, who I presume had been waiting for me. At all events, there she was, and she wished to speak with me a moment — privately, of course. I sent off Mowbray, telling him I would meet him at the St. Charles shortly, and went with Madame into her 'sanctum sanctorum.' It was all right—a round six hundred, and this pretty trifle, awaited my pleasure. I tried my best to get out of the mistress where the very acceptable came from; but no—the cunning old Sphynx was as close-mouthed as her granite namesake among the pyramids. A young gentleman had just presented it to her — (for 'a consideration' of course, though she would n't mention *what.*) I wormed it out at last, indirectly, that said 'young gentleman' was still in the house. A thought struck me: it was more than probable that a young lark who could afford to sport a trinket like this," (here he held up my watch,) "would be worth the plucking, if 'a friend' could

get him into a billiard saloon. I determined at once to watch for him, and, if possible, to make his distinguished acquaintance. After some little irrelevant conversation, I bade the amiable 'hostess' *bon soir*, (first borrowing her pretty little 'tooth-pick' here; for, as I told her, some fool might take a fancy to my plunder before I reached the hotel;) and I left her, with a thousand dollars newly credited on my bonds. Just under the lamp in the hall, I took a fancy to see the hour: pausing, I drew out my new chronometer — examined it a little, calculating how much it would bring, some 'rainy day,' at that infernal, rascally old Jew's, who does business for me when I 'm 'hard up;' and somehow I touched the spring at the back; it flew open — the accommodating little thing! — and there, what did I see? '*Henriette de Hauterive, New Orleans, La., June 1st*, 1850.' *Feux d'enfer!* how it scorched and blinded me! It burst upon me like the shock of forty electrical machines — it was a shock that might galvanize a dead man to life! It took my breath away for full two minutes. My suspicions all correct: you there in the house at that very moment — and *alone!* Fortune, for once, was playing directly into my hand. My course was decided upon in a moment: while I had the advantage I meant to keep it. I awaited your exit, at the door — followed you. Fearing to lose you in the Rue Royale, I took another way, and awaited you at the last crossing yonder — a spot I knew you would be compelled to pass before reaching home. And I found you. *Comprenez-vous, mon coup de desespoir?*"

Yes; I began fully to comprehend him now, to my cost. Here he paused a moment in his narration, glared down upon me, drawing a little closer, edging from the gate toward me. I stood perfectly still, watching and biding my time.

"And now, perhaps, you are wondering, my fair *cœur*

de marbre, why I have watched you thus, followed you — 'persecuted you,' you will call it. *Mort eternelle!* it is because I love you still! What has drawn me on, day after day? You, my glorious *œil de serpent — you!* Wrong? Very well, the wrong has been done simply *pour l'amour de vous.* Listen to me. For myself, I do not doubt your motive in visiting Lesueur's house; that it was good, I truly believe. I have talked to you otherwise to-night. That was to show you what a marvellous story might be made out of your rather imprudent escapade, and how this good, pleasant, reputable world would delight in convicting you of — '*all evil,* and that continually.' It was to show you, too, that you are wholly in *my* power. I have but to breathe this tale of midnight adventures, and you are ruined — ruined past all redemption. But — I love you — *belle dêesse.* My faith in your purity and nobleness is unshaken; and even we, the most profligate of men, (as I acknowledge myself to be), even we know how to love, to honor, to adore a truly *good woman.*" Mentally, I took the liberty of very decidedly doubting this assertion; but I said nothing whatever — and he went on: "In other days you thought I sought you for your fortune alone; there you did me a partial injustice. That your wealth had charms for me, I will not deny; money has attraction for all men, and if I am not proof against its fascinations, I will not lie to hide it. I acknowledge that your ample estate, your high social position, your family influence, your glowing, burning beauty, all — all have their charms for me. For 'all in all,' I love you madly — don't interrupt me with that gesture of proud impatience, for *you must* and *you shall* hear me! Once despised, rejected, abhorred perhaps — I love you *now* to madness; and it is the single purpose of my life to call you mine. And more, I hold the power that *makes you mine!*"

I confess that my heart for a moment stopped its throbbings — that my eyes dazed and my limbs shook, as I gazed upon the man before me. The background, so dark, threw out into strong relief that pallid, defiant face, lit up by flashes of flickering lamplight. Over all those carved features there lay a deathly calm, hiding a lava-fire; the lips pale and passionate, the eyes fierce, intensely luminous, and absolutely terrible to me in their fixed, serpent-like expression, mingled with the loathsome love he dared so boldly to avow. Mentally, I was shaken with impatience, rage, and terror, and, for the second time that night, felt that I could have killed him without compunction. As I stood there still, rigid, breathless, almost ready to fall, yet by the mighty effort of an indomitable *will* maintaining a forced calm and a steady position, he sprang to my side, confronting me with those flaming, eager, and hungry eyes.

"And now," he uttered hoarsely, and in the deep tones of controlled and concentered passion, "*now* comes the triumphant moment when I exercise that power. I hold you in my hand, Henriette de Hauterive; it is mine to crush or caress you at my will. Beware the former; death itself were better — far better for such as you. *Ecoutez vous?* Be mine — my wife; resign to me that glorious beauty; lay at my feet your hoarded gold; bend to my bidding that imperious will; bow to my call that proud spirit; in short, be mine — *all mine*, and this dread secret goes down to the grave in silence. Refuse — reject me *now*, as once you did, and the world feeds like a famished vampyre upon your stainless fame. 'None so low,' so vile, as to 'do you reverence' *then*. It is for *this* — for this alone, that I have watched and waited; and now my triumph is complete; my love and my revenge alike are on the eve of that day when I shall write against them, 'Sated to the full!' *Voilà!* I hold in my hand the glittering

proof of your — degradation. How it will flash back its answers upon a questioning world — a world that with gusto licks up the blood of many a fair reputation — that laps it like thirsty blood-hounds! Reflect ere you decide: I chain down my impatience to give you time."

He bent his head, looking out at me from under sable brows; his eyes glowing and scintillating like those of some crouching tiger, ready to spring upon his defenceless prey, the whole face kindling and quivering as with intense mental agony; an inexpressible emotion convulsing the ashen lips, and great drops bedewing the white, contracted forehead. For perhaps a full minute — it seemed ages to me — he stood glooming upon me thus with those terrible trenchant eyes, full of a beauty dark and fierce — a beauty inexpressibly repellant, and such as we fancy "has all the seeming of a demon that is dreaming." I was neither charmed nor fascinated by the strange power of those subtle, scintillating eyes; I was fixed as by some stony spell. Misinterpreting my silence, those eyes glittered with a wild, triumphant light; the pale, compressed lips relaxed, and the whole white, white face glowed with an unnatural expression of passion and exultation. The change, so sudden and so strange, came upon his voice, too; for, as he drew nearer to me — so near that I felt his hot, panting breath burn along my cheek, he said, in tones so singularly soft and sweet that I could scarce believe them his: "Forgive me! oh, forgive me! you who are my keenest *peine du cœur*. Remember that what I have done, was done for you. Do you ask, '*Que produiront vos travaux?*' I answer — pardon me, my hope was to gain — *yourself*. 'Tis a mad passion drives me wild — possesses me like *les peines de l'enfer!* I would not distress you, bright *belle étoile polaire, née dans le ciel*: I love you — love you *avec fureur*, and even to despair! Must I forever despair?

What say those 'soft, consenting eyes'? I have named my price — it is *yourself.* Are you willing to pay it? If so, then take this glittering proof of a secret that shall be buried forever in my own bosom. My heart is panting for your answer — your answer, *comme un éclair!*"

As he spoke, he held out the glittering bauble before me; with the other insolent arm he sought to clasp my waist — the gate! the gate was left unguarded! Goaded to desperation by his insulting words — frenzied beyond all self-control by terror, rage, and pain, as he uttered "Your answer!" I sprang forward, with my left hand grappled the chain hanging from his hand, and, half shrieking — "Take your answer, '*comme un éclair*'!" with my right arm, stiff and aching as it was, I brought down the stinging slender cane directly across those insolent lips, and, like an arrow, darted past him through the still unguarded gate! I saw the red blood spout from his lip where that sharp, cutting blow fell; and my hand, which would have torn from him the "proof" of his falsehoods, felt as though it was being severed from the arm: the keen, point-linked chain, still held firmly in his grasp, ran through my hand, cutting the delicate glove, tearing its deep furrow into the flesh, and leaving the coveted treasure still in his hand! I heard a deep execration of mingled rage and pain; but on I flew up the broad walk. The front entrance was closed and dark; I paused not a moment, but passed round the house with flying feet, making for the stairway by which I was wont to enter when I returned by the gardens. Halfway round, and I heard echoing footsteps close upon me. *Juste ciel!* I was pursued — hunted down to my very hearthstone! Oh! the dread horror that curdled round my sinking heart as I flew before my pursuer — across the broad pavement — along the colonnade — through the back door, which stood ajar — up the winding stairway, which

was dimly lighted — to sink down, at last, exhausted and half-fainting, on the landing beside my own chamber door! Those echoing footsteps still pursued me: when I fell, two arms went round me, assisting me to rise — I looked up in wonder: it was Ninette!

"Thank God!" I breathed. "Help me in, child;" and she assisted me into the dressing-room. I fell upon her little couch — I could go no farther. The girl uttered a low cry as she glanced down at the sleeve of the white holiday dress, which she still wore: my hand had rested on her arm, and the sleeve was stained from wrist to elbow with my blood.

"Be quiet, Ninon — you 'll waken some one. Get me some water, quick! water!" I gasped. She brought it hurriedly. I drank it off, and sank back into a state of semi-unconsciousness, just as the clock in the lower hall chimed the hour — one — two — three!

For half an hour, perhaps more — I know not how long it was — I lay in this half-conscious, half-stupefied state. I had all the while a sense of pain; I knew that some one was watching over me, and working with me; but I had not sufficient power or sense remaining, either to move or speak. When I awoke, as it were, I was still lying on Ninette's low lounge, in a *robe de nuit*, and with my hand dressed and resting on a small pillow by my side. My good Ninon! She was weeping, and frightened; yet she had done all this for me herself, not even daring to call up my old nurse to assist her in getting me — as she phrased it — "into my lady's ways again."

"*Helas!* mademoiselle — my poor, dear mistress, where have you been? What has mangled your little hand in that shocking way? *Eheu!* surely this is one *malaventure!* What will the good young master say? And, oh! why

did you run so from *me*, mademoiselle?" the girl lamented and questioned, alternately.

"Because you were running after me, I suppose," I said, half smiling, to comfort her. "How could I know that it was you, Ninon? Why did you do so?"

"Why did I run after you, mistress? Because, you staid so late, I was nearly distracted. I've walked up and down, near the lower garden-gate, off and on, ever since sundown; and sometimes I would go and look from the vestibule, thinking, perhaps, you'd come the front way. I put on my shawl, and went round to the front at last. Well, I had n't been there a minute, standing by that big rose, the 'Cloth of Gold,' when I hears your voice, saying something in a scream like, down at the gate — and here you come a-flyin' up the walk. You did n't see me; and, as you went sailing by, I just naturally ran after you. I did n't think of doing anything else. *Pardie!* mademoiselle, where *have* you been, to get so hurt and so frightened?" sobbed the poor girl.

"Stop crying, Ninon, and I will tell you. But, first, have you been to inquire for monsieur *mon père* this evening?"

"No, mistress; but, at tea-time I asked Thomas, and he said master was sleeping. Thomas never went out this evening, at all. Now, mademoiselle, do tell me how you come to hurt your poor hand so," she entreated.

As the girl was in my confidence, I narrated, in a few words, feebly spoken, the leading incidents of that eventful night. The blessed Sabbath evening — day of quiet rest — what an evening and night this had been to me! What events crowded into a few brief hours! Yet all that I had done, and suffered, seemed to me a necessity. I felt that I could look up to heaven and say, with a full heart, "Father! lead me in the right — give me Thy blessing —

and forget me not, now that I walk in dark places, and in the very shadow of death!"

"Oh! my dear lady," cried Ninon, as I finished my brief recital, "and you have promised to go to that dreadful place again — to-morrow! Oh! don't — don't think of it! You will come to some harm — and *then* what will become of us all? What will young master do? What would *monsieur le père* say, if he knew it? Ah! Miss, you *won't go*, now?" coaxed the girl. She was crying bitterly.

"I have *promised*, my good Ninon," I said. "Don't cry — assist me to my own bed; and then do you go to sleep. *Soyez tranquille* — we will talk of this to-morrow."

Ninette obeyed — but I heard her sobbing still, after she had gone to bed in my dressing-room. Completely worn out with past excitement and present pain, it was but a short time after I pressed my own couch before a dreamy quiet brooded softly over my lately tensioned nerves; and a delicious "poppied warmth" seemed stealing over every sense, wooing me to slumber. A sudden fancy struck me. I rose, and, with some difficulty unlocking one of the venetians, looked out. The gray dawn was just breaking in the east — the lamp at the gateway flared up a moment — flickered — and went out. I stole back, crept under the snowy cover, and in a few moments lay lulled upon the bosom of "tired nature's sweet restorer — balmy sleep."

CHAPTER XV.

THE COBRA STRIKES.

. . . . A step! Who is it dares intrude
On this, our known and guarded solitude?

The ghastly cheek, as marble cold and white,
The wild eyes flashing with unholy light —
The quivering lip — the forehead's dew-moist pore —
The sudden start —
No more — I saw no more;
My heart grew cold — my brain swam round —
I sank upon the floor!

L. E. L.

THERE was a sudden jar, and with a start I found myself awake, and sitting bolt upright in the bed. "Thank heaven! to-night's packet brings Sigismond!" was the first thought which swept across my half-bewildered brain.

"I beg your pardon, mistress; I did n't mean to make such a noise; I 'm so sorry I waked you, Miss — but I wanted to raise the window a little more, and it slipped, ma'm'selle," apologized Ninette from the direction of the window.

"Ah! is it you, Ninon? Is it daylight yet? Have I been asleep at all?" I asked confusedly, trying to gather up my scattered ideas.

"*Oui*, mademoiselle — see!" and the girl opened the venetians several inches — a broad bar of brilliant sunlight fell upon the wall directly opposite me. It fell — how strange that it should strike *just there!* full across the

face of a large portrait of my father, which hung upon the wall, opposite my bed. My mother's portrait, hanging by its side, was shrouded in gloom: the whole room, indeed, was dark, except that one spot, where the keen, searching light of heaven fell, like a revelation — kindling up the rich frame about the picture into glowing and golden fires. *Ah, Dieu!* what a thought was that, which, as I caught that face, cut flashingly down into my soul, like a sharp, glittering blade dropped into deep, deep water! The water instantly closed over the knife — it might rust away there, but it was hidden, and must so remain. Thousands of times I had looked upon the proud, handsome face — the face of manhood in its early prime — and the sight never shook me thus. Heaven help me — I must be going mad! There was a terrible burning in my brain — a deadly sickness at my heart: the whole wall, dark as it was, seemed to shine with hot, glowering, glaring faces: — *these pictures* were driving me mad! I fell forward with a groan — my face buried in the bedclothes. Chills shivered over me; my eyes seemed all aflame with dancing lights; and a strong, suffocating stricture seized my throat, as if thin iron fingers were pressing deep into the flesh. Surely death itself were less agonizing.

"Oh! Miss, your poor, poor hand!" cried Ninette, running up and placing her arms about me. "Let me lift you up — do let me do something to ease the pain."

"*Non — non.* You cannot ease *this* pain," I moaned.

"Yes, I can; let me raise you up, anyhow — you 'll faint, smothering down there;" and, suiting the action to the word, she placed her arms under mine, and half raised me. I broke from her, shuddering, and cowered down again like a guilty thing, upon the bed. There was a pause.

"Ninon! is that blind closed?"

"No, mademoiselle."

"Well, shut it — this instant, shut it!" I exclaimed, sharply; and the girl obeyed.

"Now, Ninon, be sure that you hang something over that — that picture there; — do it to-day — you understand?"

"Yes, Miss; is it master's you mean?"

"Of course it is."

"And dead mistus's too, mademoiselle?"

"No — yes — yes — both, of course. I can't bear to see — the frames injured," I concluded, suddenly recollecting myself.

"La! Miss Henriette," laughed the maid; "what's to hurt the frames? This room is so cool and dark always; and there is n't a fly, Miss, nor a spider, nor a — "

"*Tenez-vous en silence! Soit! Écoutez vous?*" I said, sternly.

"Yes, mistress."

"And, Ninon," I added, kindly, "run down and bring me the letters that came this morning."

"Here they are, mademoiselle — only two. Thomas was just putting them into your vase as I came through the hall from breakfast; so I brought them to give to you as soon as you awoke;" and she went to the table, returning with two letters.

"Both from Sigismond!" I exclaimed; "and to-night I shall see him!" But I was doomed to disappointment. His first letter, which had been delayed, spoke in high hope of his return on Monday (this) evening — one day earlier than he had expected; but the last, written only yesterday morning, informed me that on account of some new complications in business that had sprung up unexpectedly, he would, in all probability, be detained until Wednesday night.

"Don't 'lecture' me, *belle amante*," he wrote; "it can't be helped. Old Le Fevre is a stubborn customer to deal with—stubborn as a fact, or a donkey; which last I'm inclined to think he resembles, in more ways than one. But even he shall not delay me long; I am famishing for the glance of a 'bonnie black e'e;' a magnetic eye which draws me home. By all means follow Dupont's advice, and get everything in train to leave the city, just as soon as possible after my return. I cannot tell yet what is to be done about your pet, the pretty Coralie—*mais, nous verrons.* I shall be down on the 'Gipsy'—she gets in at about four o'clock in the morning, and late as it may be; (or early rather,) I shall hope to find you awake, and ready to meet me. Ah! *fleur-de-lis*, will you sleep while I am coming? 'Lady, I kiss thine eye,' as Oberon says, (to keep those eyes *awake*, I suppose;) and so—*au soin de Dieu*, I leave you, my best *paix du cœur.*

"*Pour la vie, votre* SAUVOLLÉE."

The paper dropped from my hand: in the dim twilight of the room I had managed to read sufficient to give me a keen heartache. Two whole days more before he would come! And when he did, Dr. Dupont would hurry us all off—and nothing be done for Coralie. I had said nothing to Sigismond concerning my interview with her at the old Plaza on the evening of his departure; he knew nothing of that picture and letter—much less of all the incidents that had transpired in such bewildering succession within the last twenty-four hours. I did not intend communicating anything until his return—then I could tell all. And to think that he, in this crisis of my affairs, should be delayed for two whole days! It was a severe trial to my impatient, impetuous spirit. I felt strong enough to *suffer*, but I had never, as yet, learned to *endure.* Thoughts—thoughts, in a wild, bewildering chaos, again gathered about me. I was nervous and in pain, but my physical was as nothing to my mental suffering. I scarcely dared speculate whether or not Berthêl would put his vile threats into

execution. I felt driven forward as by some all-potent, irresistible fatality; which made me almost ready to exclaim, "Let him do it—let him do his worst. I *cannot* help it—and I *will not* care for it. He *shall not* crush me!" Then—go to Coralie I must: I had promised, and the appointment must be kept. I would bring her away with me, if possible. I thought of her sweet, beseeching face, as she said, "Don't stay long," and I could not resist *that*. Besides—and here I glanced cautiously, almost fearfully, up at the picture which I felt persuaded was watching me from the opposite wall: it was dim now; I saw only the outline through the gloom, and the faint glitter of the frame. I could not finish that thought even to myself—but it determined me to keep my appointment, even if I was compelled to be carried there. *It must be done.*

At that moment the clock in the great hall below, struck. I caught my breath and listened. *Nine.* I rose hastily and crossed the room. Not daring to look up into the pictured face as I came closer to it, I fled along beneath it into the lighted dressing-room. As I passed, I felt a thrill of childish fear, as if dreading lest a cold hand should stretch downward, falling heavily upon me to arrest my flight, and challenge my secret questionings? I breathed more freely when I passed up to the dressing-room window, which was open—the sunlight playing over dewy foliage below, and merry matin birds singing in the garden. Ninette was in the room, busying herself about my morning toilette, etc.

"The bath is all ready, mademoiselle," she said, as I entered.

"Very well—you are always prompt, Ninon," I said, as I opened the door of a second apartment leading from the dressing-room. "Have me a fresh roll and a cup of strong coffee sent up in half an hour."

"*Oui*, mademoiselle."

Before ten o'clock I felt like a new being. The fresh, invigorating, life-giving bath, the strong, stimulating coffee, and a cool, light dressing-robe had done wonders for me. My maid had dressed my wounded hand; and the pain had greatly abated, or I was more able to bear it—I scarce knew which: she had bathed my right arm again with a stimulant, and altogether I felt that I had in a measure "returned to myself." My thoughts were principally of Coralie. Whatever was done must be done speedily—and that by myself. I thought of leaving home for an indefinite period—leaving her amid temptations and dangers, creeping stealthily around her, like hot-mouthed beasts in the arena, at every circle drawing closer and closer—the glare of ravenous eyes, the gnash and glitter of bloody and relentless fangs; and it was with difficulty I smothered back the sharp shriek of terror which sprang from heart to lip, almost ere I was aware. The dangers I imagined were less dangerous than the real perils which surrounded her. Then I pleased myself fancying that all was over, that I had won her to my home and heart. I saw the joy, the sweet love-rest of a day when, forgiving my deception, she would dwell with me—happy, safe, loving, through long coming years. But let me not anticipate.

I had but few minutes in which to indulge my thoughts. Catching up a silken scarf, I threw it over my shoulders in such a way as to throw a mass of the folds over my left arm and hand; and went to visit my father. He was lying back upon the pillows when I entered, and looked so worn and haggard that no one could have believed it possible that he was once the original of the picture hanging in my bed-chamber. He was unusually ill and weak, and I felt strangely nervous and agitated as I took his offered hand

and bade him good morning. My eyes were full of tears, my voice low and tremulous; in some mysterious depth of my nature, beyond the soundings of self-analysis, lay the secret spring of those tears and tremors. Our interview, however, was short.

"Do you know, my dear child," said my father, after I had sat by him a little while—"do you know that I have taken your advice, and sent for Dupont, this morning?"

"Ah! sir, and do you feel so much worse?" I broke forth, while my tears fell fast.

"Oh! no: don't weep, my daughter—do not distress yourself about it, or I shall repent of my decision at once," he replied. "No—not worse, I think; only very weak—very much prostrated. I sent for Dupont to ask his opinion about my leaving town. If I do not recruit a little, I fear I shall not be able to travel when Sauvollée returns. He will not be here until Wednesday night; or, rather, Thursday morning."

"You have heard from him, then?"

"Yes; and so have you. I sent two letters down for you this morning, when the mail was brought in. Le Fevre is giving him some trouble: it will not amount to much in the end, I imagine; however, these annoying people must be satisfied. Our business is all right—everything square. Sauvollée manages well—very well. Was not that a ring, my dear?"

Thomas entered at this moment. "Dr. Dupont is below, sir."

"Show him up, Thomas. And now, my child," he added, as the servant disappeared, "you must leave me for a while. I don't care to have you see Dupont; he will be distressing you with his conjectures that I am a great deal worse than I really am. There they come—you must go now;" and I obeyed. In the hall I met Eugene.

"Do everything you can for him," I said, as I held out my hand.

"If it be not already too late, my friend," he replied, as he grasped my extended hand and shook it warmly. Then, seeing the tear-traces on my face, he added: "But we must *try*, and we must hope for the best while trying. God bless you!" and he passed on toward my father's apartments.

"Now, Ninette!" I exclaimed, as I again entered the dressing-room; "my *citizen's dress* once more—and be quick!"

"Oh! mademoiselle—dear Miss Henriette, you are not going to that wicked, wicked place again! Oh! Miss, don't go—*don't!* I had such a dreadful dream about it last night—or this morning, I mean. Alas! mistress, if you were to meet again that wicked, drunken M. Berthêl in the streets, as you did last night, oh! dear Miss, what would be done? He would expose you right there—*bon Dieu! bon Dieu!*" The girl, with her dream and her fears, was worked up to a "white heat" of excitement and alarm.

"You know I have promised, my good Ninon, and what I *say* I must *do*. So make haste and get out my clothes, or I shall be obliged to do it myself," I said, as I stood before the Psyche arranging my hair.

"But, Miss—*dear* mistress, you will surely come to harm! Now, why can't you wait until the young master comes back? Oh! if he knew what you are going through, would n't he tear things to pieces to get here? And he will be here to-morrow. Do—*do wait!*" persisted the maid, as she began, slowly, to lay out my *citizen's* costume.

"He will not be here before Thursday morning," I said, "and I cannot 'wait' on him. Something must be done; and as there is no one to do it but a woman, by a woman

it must be done — that 's all. You are not wont to dispute my will, Ninette."

"Oh! Miss — don't think it 's that. I 'd go to the ends of the earth to do your bidding; but I can't bear to stay *here*, and know you are *there*. Do let *me* go with you, mistress, please."

"No, no, no — that would *never* do, *pauvre enfant*," I said, smiling at her naiveté. "Make haste, however, and brush off my coat. When I fell on the pavement last night —"

"*Tiens!* just only look at these — these *things!*" cried the girl, holding up the satiny black trousers, which had suffered somewhat in appearance where they had come in contact with the wet pave. I laughed aloud; no soul could have helped it — the girl's countenance was such a ludicrous combination of supreme disgust, contempt, and offended dignity.

"Never mind — brush them up quick, Ninon — *vivement!* I promise you it is the *last time* I shall wear them. Will that suit you?"

"Yes — sure enough it may be the last time: you may be carried home — dead, in them — *helas!*" she answered, dolefully.

"Nay, not so bad as *that*, I trust, my good *Dolores*," I responded playfully; and soon I stood up before the mirror, surveying myself, in full costume.

"And then what will you do with that poor hand?" she asked; "you can't wear a glove at all."

"Stay, I did not think of that — well — thus: will that do?" I replied, as I threw my handkerchief round the hand and placed my little cane in it also, as though it held both. It pained me greatly at first to close the mutilated fingers on these articles, but there was no help for it; and I did not intend to allow them to remain so for any length

of time. I was ready, and it wanted only fifteen minutes to eleven.

"To think that you *will* go — and all alone by yourself — and into such a place!" broke forth Ninon, as she followed me down through the shaded garden-walk. We made our exit from the house as adroitly as formerly, and when we stood together at the garden gate, I said, seriously, "You must not forget Ninon, that *le bon Père* goes with us always — He will care for me. Now watch for me, but do not be uneasy. I don't know at what hour I shall be able to return. Have my room ready, and see that my father — but Thomas is with him. I will not stay long." Closing the gate, I emerged into the narrow back-street, hastened forward to a more frequented thoroughfare, called a passing hack, and in a few minutes drew up at the entrance of the "Maison des Bijoux." I glanced abroad. Everything was quiet — scarcely any one passing. I sprang out. "Now be off with you, sir," I exclaimed, tossing the hackman his fare; "you need not wait for me."

"Thank 'e; and I reckon I *need n't* wait — seein' as when I sets young gents down *here*, they can't say how long they 'll stay," muttered the man, with a leer, as he pocketed the coin. Again the hot, haughty blood flushed into my face — I could not grow accustomed to such things. But — soon I should be done with them, forever. I turned away quickly, and bounded up the steps. No one in the hall — not even the lackey, Jean; but, awaiting me at the half-open door of the private parlor, stood Coralie, and in a moment I held her to my heart.

"Thanks! a thousand thanks for your punctuality! See how prompt you are!" she said, softly and joyfully, as she closed the door and pointed to the *pendule* on the mantel. It was just upon the stroke of eleven.

"Where is the Madame?" I inquired, after the first flush

of our joyful meeting was over. "I wish to see her at once — to have this matter of your leaving here, adjusted speedily. I am not going away without you — indeed, I must take you away this morning."

"Oh! that you *could* do so!" she fervently exclaimed. "But, no — Madame will not consent to that, I fear. She is at home, and desired me to wait for you at this door, saying that she would come presently. She seems very greatly annoyed this morning — I do not know why. Poor woman! her life is really a most miserable one."

"Could you expect it to be otherwise, dearest? No — believe me, misery is the direct and necessary consequence of the life she leads. It is from all this wretchedness that I would hurry *you* away. We cannot leave too soon. I trust that Madame Lesueur will give me an early audience, for I am exceedingly impatient. My father is ill, and I ought to be by his bedside even now."

"Your father! you have then a father living?" uttered Coralie.

"Yes — did I not tell you?"

"No. Ah! what a happy thing to have a father — or a mother," she sighed. "Is he an old man, Henri?"

"Not very old *ma chère*, but a confirmed invalid — nay, dying, I fear."

"Oh! I hope not. Why could *I* not go to *your* father, Henri — for a little while, you know, until I can obtain employment?" queried Coralie, her eyes dilating and flashing with joy at the idea.

"Perhaps — perhaps you can, dearest," I answered. Her words brought back a thought which filled my heart with burning pain. She noted my sad expression, and hastened to change the conversation. "See, Henri, what you left here last night. I found it lying on the floor there by the table, and have kept it for you. I knew

it was yours, because no gentleman entered this room last night, except yourself." And she handed me my little pistol. I took it — examined it carefully — it was all right.

"Perhaps it was quite as well that this was in your possession last night: had it been in mine, I should have used it rashly," I half soliloquized. "And it maybe you had best keep it still," I added, "lest I may be tempted to — to — "

"What? what would you do?" she asked, hastily; for I had cocked the pistol and held it up, poised just above her bosom.

"Kill you — perhaps — if I cannot get you away," I answered, smiling, as I threw my arm about her waist and drew her toward me. She looked up confidingly into my face with those glorious love-lit eyes, and murmured, "Yes, that would be better — much better."

"Ha! *what's that* — in the name of Heaven?" I exclaimed, a moment after. It was in the hall — the confused sound of men struggling together. A heavy body came crashing heavily against the door of the parlor where we sat. I sprang to my feet, with Coralie trembling on my left arm, which had encircled her. My right was disengaged, and still held the pistol ready cocked.

"You can't do it, sir — them 's my orders, sir — and I'll swear you sha'n't go in thar in that fix!" said a determined voice, as the struggle continued. The voice was Jean's.

"*Mille diables!* Off! you yellow hell-hound! Off! I say. Take that! now 'down to hell, and say *I* sent you there!'" jarred forth a deep, angry voice. God protect me! I knew it too well — *Berthêl!* There was a sharp wail of pain — then the door shook violently — burst open, and Berthêl, like a perfect madman, leaped into the room and

confronted me! A deadly cobra-di-capello coiled for the fatal spring could not have astonished or appalled me more. Without coat, vest, or cravat — his hair staring up from a demoniac face; his eyes glaring and blood-shot; his purpled and swollen lips champing foam; his right hand brandishing that glittering knife with fresh blood staining its keen, thin point — he stood a moment like a tiger crouching for the fearful spring, or the cobra poising himself for the point in which to strike his deadly fang! It was but a moment — I saw that he meant mischief. I had not moved from my position.

"Stand back, sir! — keep your distance, or I fire!" I exclaimed, bringing the pistol to bear upon him.

"*That* for your penny whistle!" he shouted, with a wild, derisive laugh, and snapping his finger and thumb. With one savage bound he sprang toward me, and I saw in a flash that he was mad — stark mad with drunken rage. He half reeled — his hand was unsteady — but, dashing Coralie aside, he gasped:

"*Now* — now, *belle tentatrice* — *mort ou vive*, you're mine! Now — for a love-embrace, in spite of God and the devil — *douce* — *dêcevante* — *ange dêchu!*" His fiery, serpent eyes glared into mine — his hot, blasting, drunken breath stifled me — one arm was thrown about me, half-pinioning my right arm to my side, while that keen blue blade came hissing down upon my left shoulder, cutting its way diagonally half across the bosom. With one despairing shriek, "Sigismond!" I half raised my arm — it was all I could do — and, without an aim, sent the contents of the ready pistol into his side!

"*Feu de l'enfer!* how it stings — *already?*" he muttered; and, not so much on account of the shot, I think, as that he was overwhelmed, exhausted by the vehement rage of his own drunken passions — he loosed his hold of me,

and fell heavily at my feet. But I, too, was going fast — sinking, fainting. I saw a confused chaos about me, in which Madame Lesueur, Marguerite, and Coralie mingled; — I saw my own blood springing through the snowy linen on my bosom — and, with one blind thought of Coralie and the long-dreaded revelation of my deception which *must and would come now* — the thousand dancing lights went out in a mighty darkness — my heart grew cold — my pulses stopped — I saw and heard and felt no more!

CHAPTER XVI.

"OPEN SESAME!"

ROSALIND. Do you know I am a woman?
PHEBE. If sight and shape be true,
Why then, my love, adieu.

SHAKSPEARE.

She might not frame her utterance. Down she bent
Her head upon an arm so white, that tears
Seemed but the natural melting of its snow,
Touched by the flushed cheek's crimson; yet life-blood
Less wrings in shedding than such tears as these!

Farewell! as we have often met
We may not meet again —
But on my heart the seal is set
Love never sets in vain.

LANDON.

IF there be a weakness in the nature of woman that I sincerely and deeply deplore, it is that of fainting away when a crisis comes up that ought to be met, boldly, calmly, and resolutely. I consider that there seems in it something that savors of cowardice — a weak and timid shirking of the responsibility which that crisis brings: it argues a lapse from the courage necessary to face emergencies, thus to drop off into a state of insensibility and allow events to take their own course, we, meanwhile, never lifting a finger to oppose or direct them! I am of the opinion that such lapses into the legitimate and "lovely weaknesses of woman," (!) by one who has always prided herself upon her strength and vigor, and *nerve*, (as I have,)

demand an apology; and if I were able to find one, I should be most happy to announce it. As it is, I have really nothing to offer in extenuation, unless it be that with a mind distracted for many days by hopes and fears, doubts and perplexities — suffering severe bodily pain and shaken sadly at the sight of my own blood — it is scarcely to be wondered at, if, despite all my boasted strength and nerve, I should, for once in my life, succumb to the soft spirit of Insensibility — the spirit that neither thinks nor dreams — that forgets to love, and ceases to regret — that brings neither joy nor grief, but only a still, strange nepenthe to the worn and weary; soothing both body and soul for a season into a lotus-crowned and Lethean *rest.*

A great pang had struck into my heart as I found myself going — going — fast sinking away into that chilly darkness of utter unconsciousness; and yet, perhaps, it was best so. I see *now* that it was — since events have proved it so. Wounded, bleeding — to all appearance dead — and because of *her:* my sex revealing itself through my sacrifice and suffering for her; surely — surely it was better thus, than that I should stand up tamely before Coralie and acknowledge in common *words* the deception I had practised upon her — as I believed, "for her ultimate good." There would have been a coldness, a calmness about that, which must have chilled her affection for me; — but was it possible that she could look upon me as I lay there — rigid and still as if bereft of life for her — and not, at least, *forgive?* Yes, I think it was better thus; and when the keenest agony of my suffering was over, I no longer regarded as a 'misfortune' the brutal and bloody blow which had cast me helpless upon the deep sympathies of her noble nature. I suffered — but through it all I began to see and to feel that "Right Hand in the darkness," which was leading me, "by a way not known," by a path

all undreamed of, to the accomplishment of my purpose. Verily, He *had* "given his angels charge concerning us."

I think I realized something of this, as the thick darkness melted slowly away from my faculties, and life crept languidly back to the still pulses and rigid limbs. When thought and sense returned to me, struggling up like white-winged angels through some confused and gloomy chaos, I lay for some time with closed eyes, striving hard to gather back my scattered sensibilities, and to realize *who* and *where* I was. Life returned to my mental being in advance of the physical; I began to hear murmured voices, coming as it were from a great distance; then I felt that cool, caressing fingers were bathing my forehead, and others chafing my rigid limbs. Gradually my senses came back to me: I heard a low voice exclaim, "*Bon Dieu!* will she *never* awake?" It was the voice of Marguerite — not Coralie. Ah! how sank my heart that *she* was silent! Perhaps she was not there; perhaps she now — angry and mortified, had fled my presence — leaving me to the tender mercies of comparative strangers. I could bear it no longer — I must *see*. Slowly and with an effort I opened my eyes — oh! so heavily, so wearily — and looked around me. Close by my side knelt Coralie; her white face ghastly in its pallor; a picture of agonized suspense; her hands clasped tightly; her pale lips apart; her still, steady eyes, from which all the lustre had gone out, fixed immovably upon my face.

"*Living?* living yet! thank God! — thank God!" burst from her lips as she caught the glance of my unclosing eyes. Then she bowed over me, murmuring "*Oh! Henri!*" and broke down completely, giving way to a passionate flood of tears. Alas! how well I knew that in that low, half heart-broken exclamation, she was bidding her young lover an eternal farewell! He died but one short

hour ago; he went down with me into the *bras de la mort.* From the dead, as it were, a new spirit had arisen — one she was not yet familiar with — as bright and pure as that of "first and passionate love," perhaps; but as yet she did not realize this: her soul was bowed over the corpse of its young love; now as dead to her as if he had never, never been. My heart ached for her with a dull agony, harder to bear than the acutest pain. My eyes closed heavily: I could not bear to look upon her grief — and I the cause. In a moment I felt her cold and quivering lips pressed eagerly to mine, as she whispered between the sobs, "Wake! oh! wake again, my best friend! do not leave me — 't is your poor Coralie that calls you!" That voice, it seemed, would have called me back from the dead. Our eyes met, and I murmured, feebly, "*Forgive!*" The swift and vivid blush which flashed for an instant over her pallid face, and then as quickly faded, leaving it by contrast paler than before, showed that she had, with woman's lightning-like intuition, instantly seized upon my meaning. She had no words with which to answer *that* appeal; she bent down and kissed me twice, eagerly, fervently, lovingly, and her warm tears fell over my face. It was enough; I knew that I was forgiven, that I was still beloved, and I was content.

"Marguerite, tell the doctor he can come in again now; we have everything arranged," said the voice of Madame Lesueur, who seemed to be bustling about me, but who, until then, I had been too much preoccupied to notice.

"No, no, no! don't call in a surgeon," I exclaimed, with sudden vehemence, all the strangeness and *unexplainableness* of my situation bursting at once upon me. "I — I — indeed I cannot see any one now; wait — wait until I can get home, and then —"

"My poor child, look around you a little," said Madame

Lesueur, in a kindly tone, taking up my hand in both of hers. "You were badly hurt, and we were obliged to send at once for a surgeon. Baptiste brought the first one he could find; I never thought to ask his name. Your wound has been dressed, you see — and the doctor retired until we dressed *you* also, *ma pauvre petite.* We see so much of life's strange phases, that I am rarely surprised at anything; yet I confess you have astonished me. You will scarcely know yourself now."

It was with a half-bewildered sense of my own identity that I looked around me, and took in, slowly, a realizing knowledge of my situation. In that same luxurious apartment where the cobra struck me, I was lying. From the low *impromptu* couch, I could see the spot where he fell, stricken in return; the glowing roses and mosses of the carpet were dyed with his blood. Two large windows were open, and the light came in softly through falling draperies of heavy rose-colored satin and filmy lace. Directly in front of one of these windows stood the Madame's favorite *fauteuil,* and, thrown carelessly upon it, I saw my "citizen's dress" — the coat gashed and blood-stained. What would Ninon think of it now? This recalled me to myself, and I began to note the metamorphose which had taken place during my unconsciousness. Bandages were passed about my shoulder and breast; a long, delicate, white robe enveloped me from head to foot; and my wounded hand was lying on a small pillow at my side. Instinctively I put my hand to my upper lip; the silky mustache, which I had worn so cavalierly, was gone. Madame Lesueur smiled as she noted the involuntary action. "All gone, *petite,*" she said; "and you cannot think how much more beautiful you are without it. Here is the good doctor, come to cure you, *ma chère.*" I looked up nervously, as the tall gentleman

came forward, and took my hand. *Voyons!* it was Dr. Dupont!

"Oh! Eugene, my friend — how can I —" I stammered, in intense confusion.

"Hush! hush! no explanations now," he smiled, placing his finger on his lip. "Explanations will come all in good time: meanwhile it 's all right, my dear friend — trust me as I trust you," and he pressed my hand warmly. Just then a sudden twinge of severe pain passed down my shoulder — as it were again the cutting of that keen, dreadful knife. I moaned heavily.

"Am I — am I much hurt?" I asked, looking up into Eugene's kindly and anxious face.

"Hurt? oh, no; not a great deal. You are a brave woman, and will get over it soon," he replied, encouragingly. I thought he was saying this merely to reassure me.

"Tell me the truth, and seriously, *mon ami;* tell me if I am in danger."

"Seriously then — no," he answered. "Not in any immediate or imminent danger. It is a severe flesh wound, which might kill delicate ladies who do not possess constitutions, but will not kill anybody with the *will to live* as strong in them as it is in you. But you must be quiet and careful. This weather is bad for you; talking and excitement are very bad. You are weak from loss of blood — have suffered a severe nervous shock — but with care you will soon be your own peculiar self again. *Mon Dieu!* what a blessing the fellow was almost too drunk to stand, and shaking so, or he might have killed you on the spot. As it was, he partially missed his aim, no doubt; his hand was too unsteady."

"Have you been up to see him, doctor?" asked Madame Lesueur.

"Yes; I went in for a few minutes, while you were making my young friend here a little more comfortable. Duplanche and his assistant were there, doing all that can be done for him. His wound is an ugly one — yet not dangerous in itself, I think. I am happy to assure you of this, my friend," he added, turning to me.

"Thank Heaven for that!" I exclaimed.

"Yes," answered Eugene, "I am glad of it for your sake. The man 'deserves killing,' as the saying is; but I would not have it that *you* should hereafter reproach yourself with having taken his life. Besides, he is killing himself just as fast as his master could wish. He will be in an attack of *delirium tremens* before ten o'clock to-night, and then Duplanche must look out for his patient."

"Is he *here* still?" I questioned.

"*Tenez!* Have I not interdicted talking?" smiled the doctor. "I insist upon doing all the conversation myself — cannot admit of your assistance, at present. Yes; Monsieur Berthêl is here — up stairs; he could not be removed to his hotel. He has been here all the morning, has he not?" he added, addressing Madame Lesueur.

"*Oui*, monsieur," was the reply. "He was here last evening until quite late; then about three this morning; a most unprecedented thing, sir, at my house; he came again, and sent for me in a perfect storm of rage. He had been drinking a great deal — I could see that; and, oh! what a way he was in! He swore to kill me right there, if I did not at once let him have a room here, and vowed that the house was his, and he would stay until it pleased him to go. I had no room to give him, but the small one just over the hall — the one window of which overlooks the hall-door; so I put him there, sir. I asked him if it would do; he said, 'Just the thing, exactly.' So I left him there. He never came down at all until he

rushed in here to kill poor monsieur — beg pardon — mademoiselle, I mean. Possibly he saw you when you arrived, Miss: you came in a carriage, and he could see you enter the house, from his window. Jean tried in vain to prevent his coming into this room; but he gave the poor fellow a bad cut upon the arm, and forced him to let go. *Ah! juste ciel!* If I could have known his intentions, he should not have remained in the house: I should have called in the police. But he gave no hint of his bloody design, and I never would have dreamed of it myself."

"It is more than probable he had no definite or matured design," said Dr. Dupont. "He was enraged at some one, or something — we know not what; had been unsuccessful at play, perhaps, and drinking freely. An *habitué* of this house, he turned hither, scarce knowing what he did. And, seeing our friend here enter the house, he possibly mistook that young gallant for some other person. I am confident that he was too far gone to know very distinctly either what he saw or did."

"We think we know certainly why he assaulted Monsieur d'Herbelot," said Madame Lesueur. "That young gentleman he chose to look upon as a rival."

"Ah! and that is it — is it?" cried Eugene. "Well, in that case, the attack, in his state, was the most natural thing in the world." I listened to these conjectures, and others — but I said nothing. I knew well why Berthêl had attacked me, and that "in his state it was the most natural thing in the world;" but I kept my own counsel for the present. Another thought took possession of me.

"Dr. Dupont," I said, softly, "I am anxious to go home. Can I go? Oh, I *must* go home!" Somehow I felt weakened down; I had no control over myself; and, at the

name, the remembrance of *home*, I turned my face to the pillow like a child, and burst into tears.

"*Home*, my dear lady?" cried the doctor, springing up and coming to my side. He drew my hand away from my eyes, and said, soothingly, "A severe case of nostalgia? Yes — yes: only keep quiet, and do not — for Heaven's sake, mademoiselle — do not excite yourself, and you *shall* go home — there, I have promised. I will take you home myself. Will that do now?"

"Yes. God bless you, Eugene!"

"That is well. Now remain perfectly calm; I will see you safe home. Don't you feel as though you could trust me?"

"Of course I do; and thank you too, my friend. But Coralie must go too," I added, earnestly, turning to Madame Lesueur.

"Coralie?" questioned Dr. Dupont; and then following the direction of my eye, his own fell upon the beautiful bowed figure that bent at the foot of my couch, partially concealed by a heavy chair. I think she was sitting on the floor, her arms thrown up on the low bed, and her face buried in them. She only raised it when her name was spoken by a strange voice. How still she was! So silent! — silent because the limits of human language lie far within the boundaries of human feeling! So still — so breathless she sat there — all seemed to forget she was in the room. I read her well. In her high heart, in her innocent and confiding nature, there was a delicate devotedness to me, an unutterable depth of tenderness and tears for my sufferings; and yet that young heart, I knew too well, was even now convulsed and aching with a tremulous misery which she could neither crush, nor, perhaps, very well define. Alas! I knew it — and its cause. The gleam of joy that flashed a moment over her expressive

face when I said, "Coralie must go," told me truly that she had not turned from me, that she still clung to me — that in losing the *boy lover*, she had not disdained to hold fast the *woman friend*. Ah, how I thanked her for that silent assurance of her forgiveness and her love!

But the fine face of Eugene Dupont, as his gaze fell upon my lovely *protégée*, I could not read so well. It seemed at first a flash of surprised delight, then a deep flush spread suddenly over cheek and brow: he turned away quickly, and, walking to a window, drew aside the drapery a moment and looked out. The emotion passed. I did not understand it then; it was plain enough to me afterward. Coming back to my side, he said, in his usual genial, graceful way, "You wish to return home, my very *im*patient patient; and I think it would be much better for you to be there. And you desire also that this young lady," bowing respectfully to Coralie, "should accompany you. Very well; she shall go — shall she not?" he added, turning to Madame Lesueur. Seeing her about to hesitate in her reply, he said, "A word with you, madame, if you please." They walked to the other end of the apartment. Coralie's head drooped lower and lower, till it rested again on the couch at my feet.

"Courage! courage! *carissima!*" I whispered. I saw that she was trembling lest the Madame should decide against her. Just then I heard Eugene say, in a low, excited tone, "Well, for a while, then. It must be so. She must not be excited by opposition. Do you give consent? I tell you plainly that it may be necessary to *her* life."

In a short time he came to me, saying, "It is settled entirely as you wish, my fair friend. This young lady shall accompany you, by especial permission — to nurse you up again. Are you an experienced nurse, mademoiselle?" he added, turning to Coralie with a smile. She looked up,

her lustrous eyes beaming, the soft tint of color creeping into the marble cheek, and the faint shadow of a smile rippling the sweet mouth. "I will take lessons from you — in cheerfulness and hopefulness," she said, with *naiveté*. The doctor laughed, and colored again slightly.

"Thank you," he said. "Cheerfulness and hopefulness are excellent tonics; use them freely, and you will become a capital nurse. Ah! I foresee that I shall soon be *de trop* as your physician, mademoiselle. Your young friend, and the elixir of happiness which she administers, will soon place you beyond my jurisdiction entirely. But," he continued, looking at his watch, "we are wasting time. It is now four o'clock, and I have two visits to make; but at six, precisely, I shall be here again, with Pierre and your own carriage, to convey you home. It will be cooler then — and darker, somewhat," he added, *sotto voce*, to me. "You must be ready, Mademoiselle Coralie; and you, Mademoiselle Henriette, must be perfectly still. I charge you not to stir one inch, or lift a finger, until I return. If I am to give you up so speedily, I will at least, while I am your physician, treat you *rigoureusement*. For the present, ladies, adieu," and Eugene was gone.

"What a fine, affable gentleman he seems to be!" cried Madame Lesueur, as the young doctor disappeared.

"Not only 'seems to be,' but *is, en vérité*," I replied. "I have known Eugene Dupont for years, and the better I know, the more I admire and esteem him."

"And how fortunate that Baptiste should have stumbled upon *him*, instead of some other surgeon whom you did not know, and dare not trust as a friend." she continued.

"Yes; it has been all ordered aright; I am content and grateful. Come to me, Coralie, my darling," I said, and the sweet girl knelt by my bedside and folded my right

hand lovingly within her own. "*I* am 'content and grateful,' too," she whispered.

"Will *you* not come also, Marguerite?" I asked. All this time she had been sitting apart from us, at the farther side of the room, isolated and alone. My heart ached for her: no one had said to her, "I cannot leave you here; you must go hence with me." She came without a word, and knelt down by Coralie. "Regal *reine* Marguerite," Berthêl had styled her; and even now she looked every inch a queen. Her proud head was bowed, and a cloud came over those great flashing, black eyes — a cloud of tears — a mist of human feeling through which I could discern the shining and throbbing of a splendid soul-star. She put her arm about Coralie's neck, and, pressing one long kiss upon the fair brow, whispered, in a broken, husky voice, "Good-by. It is the last time that we shall stand together as companions; you will go — and for me, it matters not. Good-by now, my better angel; the sole *good* which has looked kindly upon the lost and lonely Marguerite. If you think there is a God to whom we may pray, then in your prayers remember her still." Coralie clung to her companion, sobbing convulsively; but Marguerite, gently loosing the detaining arms, raised herself, and, taking my hand, said in low, impassioned tones, "I have found *at last* that 'peculiar leaf' of which we once spoke, you remember—a 'good woman.' When I saw you here as a man, I judged you as a man; I gave you credit for no other than a sinful and selfish purpose; for I have been taught by bitter experience what amount of confidence is to be placed in the protestations of men. But when I see you lying here, and know that you are a woman — one whose motive has only been to seek and save a sister woman; when I see the sacrifices you have made, the trials you have undergone, the pain you now suffer; when I

think of the dangers you have dared in venturing *here*, to drag the tiger's prey from his very jaws — I tell you, madame, that I have found the talismanic 'leaf' — a *good woman* — and, from henceforth, I shall bind your memory to my heart. I shall keep my promise; I shall wear your remembrance as an amulet. One day, perhaps, you will know that by your woman's faith, your woman's courage, and your woman's love, you have redeemed a wayward and erring nature, although you intended it not. You are a woman of *action* — neither a 'slave' nor a 'serpent,' such as men make of their subjects. And let me say to you, that if ever there is any good accomplished for women like *me*, it will be done by women like *you*. The 'slaves,' and the 'serpents,' and the men that make them, can do nothing. It is for your *action* and your *example*, noble lady, that I bless you — that I shall reverence you, and bless you with my latest breath. You have given me back a *hope;* you have rekindled a spark of my lost faith in humanity; you have given a new guiding-star to my solitary, wandering bark, which may one day lead it safely into calmer and purer waters."

"*Dieu le veuille! Dieu le veuille! oh! ma chère Marguerite!*" sobbed Coralie, still kneeling, and lifting her tearful eyes to heaven. I, too, from the very depths of my soul, echoed her prayer, "God grant it."

"For this, then," resumed Marguerite, "I shall never cease to bless you; and if there be, as we are told, (and I, if I could, would fain believe,) an Eye that sees us all — a Hand that rewards us all according to our deserts — then that Almighty Hand will surely bless you also. Farewell! and sometimes remember — Marguerite!" She was weeping wildly; her impetuous nature swayed now to its grief with the same *abandon* as when it drained the wine of pleasure to the lees. She wrung my hand painfully,

hurried from the room, and for many days I saw her no more. But, when my necessity came, she did not forget me.

That was a memorable evening. The two hours that intervened between the departure of Eugene Dupont and his return were crowded with hopes, aspirations, and memories — enough to furnish the lifetime of many a one. After Marguerite's passionate farewell, I stated to Coralie and Madame Lesueur, as briefly as possible, who and what I was, and why I had come among them as I did. I related all that was necessary concerning my last night's interview with Berthêl, and represented him in his true colors. And I concluded by an appeal to Madame Lesueur, into which I threw all the eloquence and arguments of which I was mistress, conjuring her to give Coralie to me — to be mine *pour la vie!*

"You plead like a *lover*, still," she said, with a smile.

"*I am* one still — will ever be one," I exclaimed. "If, in after years, I shall find one who would have sought Coralie as I have done; who will love her as I have loved — then I shall be willing to resign my position as devoted 'lover,' but not till then."

"You will never find that individual among *men*, mademoiselle," said Madame Lesueur, decidedly. "Men, as I know them, are made of different material than that which Nature uses in the manufacture of generosity, disinterestedness, and self-sacrifice," she added, with bitterness. "But, perhaps, I ought not to constitute myself a judge: my life has been on a 'lower level' than yours; possibly I have never met the 'best of men,' as they are styled."

"Well, madame, since I am only a woman," I said, playfully, "and not even one of the 'best of men' — having now no claims whatever upon the sex you are inclined to depreciate — there is no reason why you should not consent

that Coralie make *my* home her home for life. I frankly tell you that you have no legal right to detain her."

"You say truly," she replied, humbly: "I have no '*legal* right' to detain her here. I have no 'right' at all; but that I love her as my own child; that I have nursed her at my bosom as my own child; that through long, weary years I have watched over her, and guarded her from all harm; that I have brought her up as well as I knew how, believing her to be the child of a better woman than I ever was, or can ever hope to be. That is all my 'right,' mademoiselle, and to you I now resign it. Be as faithful to her interests as I have been, and her dead mother will look down upon you in kindness and love. It is because I know her own mother would will it so, that I agree to part with her, and resign her to you and a higher life. I ought, I suppose, to see more clearly the benefits arising from this change, but there is a selfish love for the child in my heart, which partially blinds me to these great advantages. You must bear with me, mademoiselle; you are rich, and gay, and honored, and can have many to love you: I am poor, and despised. I have had but one thing on earth to love, and to hope loved me."

The usually cold eyes were now brimful of tears; the usually calm and premeditated tones were broken; the studied self-possession was gone, and her manner was full of genuine, long-suppressed emotion. Coralie threw herself into her foster-mother's arms; and I, who felt as though I was robbing her of her last treasure, held out my hand, exclaiming, "Forgive me, that through me 'your house is left unto you desolate.'"

I looked at the bright head, pillowed fondly upon a bosom I had deemed so pulseless. I remembered the joyful elation with which that sobbing child had contemplated leaving this impassive woman, and I said to myself,

"Wise judges we are of each other!" Did Coralie ever dream that such bitter tears would be shed when she bade adieu to the "Maison des Bijoux"? The child-heart was very sore, no doubt. She had found that she would leave behind a sincere affection which she never before had fathomed; she had lost also, that day, the light of a Love which she expected would go forth with her, and walk by her side forever. Poor child! We learn life slowly. As the years pass by, there are days when we go down alone into the dead past, with its dust and darkness; and our errand is ever a sad one. We go to bury away out of our sight some dead love, or broken hope, or faded memory. Coming out from the crypts, we replace the stone with dry, calm eyes, and only write anew upon the marble, "Disappointment." But all this was then new to my Coralie. My soul went forth to her in deepest sympathy, as I saw the strong effort of her reason to bury away out of her sight this first rich bloom of purest passion — first flower of love that had "bloomed in the summer of her heart." But, if we would win the jewel of any great good, we must pay the price. Tears stole over my face, as I reflected that it was through both sympathy and suffering that I had learned the magic "Open Sesame" which released my treasure from her dark surroundings, and gave her to me forever. Had I known the price before being called to pay it, would I have shrunk from the demand? No, surely, "a thousand times, *no*." A truce to reflection — at that moment a carriage was driven rapidly up to the front door, and stopped. Eugene, true to his appointment, was there to carry us home.

"What! not yet ready?" he exclaimed, as he entered the room and his eye fell upon Coralie. "Why, young ladies, I expected to find you bonneted, mantled, etc., in readiness for your drive. Are you not going home this

evening, *ma belle amie* — victim of a virulent nostalgia?" laughed Eugene, as he came forward to my couch.

"Did you not charge me, under ban of your displeasure, not to dare move an inch until your return?" I retorted, answering his gayety.

"Yes, I did. But you 've been disobeying orders: there now — no denials; I know it. Your cheeks are too red — your eyes are too bright to suit me — and, as I live! I verily believe you 've been *crying*. Oh! these demoiselles! Would that I were dressed in a little of Sauvollée's 'brief authority,' (I foresee it would indeed be *very* 'brief,') — I would lecture you soundly, mademoiselle.

'*Mais, vertubleu!*
What can one poor doctor do
With demoiselles accustomed always to act *comme on veut?*' "

His pleasantry did me good; his cheerfulness was truly a fine tonic. He ran on, in his gay, good-humored way, evidently with the intention of cheering me up, and, as usual, he succeeded. It was some minutes before Coralie (who had left the room with Madame Lesueur, upon the doctor's entrance,) returned. She was ready to leave, and I saw by her face, under the deep veil, that her adieus had been said. Eugene placed her in the carriage, and, returning, wrapped me from head to foot in a great shawl; and, lifting me in his arms, bore me forth also. Thus I left, for the last time, that dungeon of souls — the "Maison des Bijoux." But I had gained what I sought there: I had spoken the "Open Sesame" — and I carried my treasure forth with me! Just as Eugene bore me through the parlor door, there came from the room above us a long, low wail that chilled my blood to the heart's core. It was fearful — more like the cry of some wild, tortured animal, than the voice of a human being. "Said I not so?" re-

marked the doctor to Madame, as he placed me in the carriage. "The fit is coming on already. Be sure to have two or three strong fellows up there to-night, or you will have trouble with him. Duplanche's man is still there, I suppose?"

"*Oui, monsieur.*" Madame Lesueur came to the carriage door, grasped my hand, uttered, in a hoarse whisper, "May God bless you!" and hastily retreated into the house.

"Now Pierre, my man, *home.* Drive slowly and carefully," cried Dr. Dupont, as he took his place by my side, supporting me in as easy a position as possible during the drive. Not more than half an hour had elapsed when I was laid gently down upon the bed in my own dear chamber. Involuntarily, as the lights were brought in, I glanced at the two pictures opposite me. Both were thickly shrouded in black crape; and with a sigh of relief, I turned to Coralie, who sat on the bedside, and listened smilingly to the wondering exclamations and lamentations of my good Ninon over the "killed and murdered and *malheureuse* condition of her poor, dear mademoiselle."

It was with much regret I learned that my father had been worse during the day, and had inquired for me repeatedly during my absence. I sent Eugene to him at once, and then, overcome by weariness, ere I was aware, fell away into a peaceful and refreshing sleep.

CHAPTER XVII.

THE NIGHT-WATCH.

> But soft! behold! Lo, where it comes again!
> I'll cross it, though it blast me. Stay, illusion!
> If thou hast any sound or use of voice,
> Speak to me.
> Hold, hold, my heart;
> And you, my sinews, grow not instant old,
> But bear me stiffly up! Remember thee?
> Ay, thou poor ghost, while memory holds a seat
> In this distracted globe. Remember thee?
>
> HAMLET.

WEDNESDAY evening — and before the dawning of another day Sigismond would be at home. How intensely my heart longed for his coming; and, oh! how much I had to tell him! How he would chafe, and chide me for my rashness; and how I should triumph in retorting gayly upon him that, while he had been maturing and "considering" the ways and means of Coralie's restoration to her proper sphere, I had "done the deed," and she was safe — rescued and redeemed! How I should enjoy assuring him that I had accomplished the sacred and self-imposed task — *without him!* Yes — I meant to have a very pretty triumph. And, in advance, I took the liberty of smiling quietly to myself, as I lay there in the soft twilight, with Coralie caressing my wounded hand, when I thought of his parting words, and the air of grave decision with which he had said:

"You must curb your impatience, and keep quiet until my return. You could not go through with your *rôle* without me: strong and spirited as you are, dear Henriette, you have not strength and spirit sufficient for *that*. Now promise me, *fleur-de-lis!*"

Men, (ordinarily,) I think, do not admire women of *action*. But, not being a man, (except upon extraordinary occasions,) I do. In general, men admire the pretty, passive things who love them; say yes or no, according to instructions; are much given to folding their white hands, and studying modestly the pattern of the carpet. To be sure, they are apt to scold the *pauvre petites* soundly for their inefficiency — after they make wives of them. Well — *ainsi va le monde*, and we will not attempt now to regenerate it, single-handed! I cannot help believing, however, that there is a sufficient *inevitable* passiveness in every woman's lot; and, therefore, no necessity that any one should adopt passivity as a "profession." If you consider it a weakness in me that I should feel quite elated at the news I had to tell Sigismond, you must pardon that weakness, and agree that, under the circumstances, it was "human nature" so to feel. Notwithstanding his prediction, I had "gone through with my *rôle*" — and successfully. True, I had suffered much, (how he would grieve for that!) but I could bear it — even be grateful for it; since my sufferings had endeared me to Coralie, when I most feared her loving nature would be wholly alienated. It was all for the best. My hand was growing better, and the long wound upon my shoulder and breast, though painful, was doing well: it did not altogether confine me to my chamber. Wrapped in a loose *robe de chambre*, and leaning on Ninette, I had that morning visited my father in his own apartments, and sat with him perhaps an hour. He re-

marked that I looked unusually pale and ill, and greatly lamented the delay in getting out of town. Of course, however, when I acknowledged that I was not feeling very well, he had no suspicion of the truth; for nothing of my *malaventures*, or of Coralie's entrance into our home as an inmate, had been communicated to him. Ninon alone was in my confidence — none else knew who Coralie really was; the other servants, even Thomas, supposing that she was merely some young friend come for a "visitation," as I frequently had acquaintances visit me in that way since I became, to all intents and purposes, "mistress of the mansion." Eugene Dupont had called in the morning. He pronounced my wound "doing admirably," but candidly confessed that he considered my father's case a critical one; adding that the disease baffled his skill — he really could make nothing of it. Evidently, Eugene was of the opinion that he had been called in too late to effect anything. Still, notwithstanding my fears for my father — in spite of intrusive misgivings which often troubled me, and despite my own pain, as I lay there in the deepening twilight — *safe at home* — with Coralie bending over me, and the glad hope of Sigismond's return glowing at my heart—I confess I gave way readily to smiles and pleasant thoughts. When I looked up into those glorious blue eyes, which were "raining sweet influences" upon me at that moment; when I thought of the fine, dark orbs that would, ere to-morrow's dawning, meet mine in tenderest appreciating love, I forgot the wicked, subtle, cobra eyes of Berthêl, with their strange fire and their fierce threatenings; I forgot that there was yet danger in him, and that the cold, questioning world — my "fashionable world" — would soon be asking, "Whence comes this lovely friend of *our* 'dear friend' Mademoiselle de Hauterive?" I looked at Coralie — I thought of Sigismond — and I was happy, sat-

isfied, contented; saying to myself, "Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof."

A delicious dreaminess stole over me as I lay there looking at Coralie, and thinking how like she was to my ideas of seraphic beauty. She sat upon the couch beside me, my hand, as usual, clasped in hers; her eyes were fixed upon the far-away star of evening, which trembled and sparkled through the open casement opposite us. Her short, clustering curls were lit up by the last rays of fading sun-fires; her delicate cheek had the soft flush of the sea-shell; the white, loose robe flowed away from the full, rounded contour of her figure, and, in a singularly clear contralto, she was singing the Evening Hymn to the Virgin:

"*Ave sanctissima,*
We lift our souls to thee!
Ora pro nobis,
'Tis nightfall on the sea.
Watch us, while shadows lie
Far o'er the water's shade;
Hear the heart's lonely sigh —
Thine, too, hath bled!"

So sweetly soft, so pure, so saintly was the scene and song; so lovely the hour, the star, and the singer; surely it must be the spirit of Saint Cecilia herself, sending forth her soul into heaven upon the wings of song! Ah! what a pathos there was in that adjuration, "Hear the heart's lonely sigh;" what an earnestness in the claim of companionship: "*Thine, too,* hath bled!" My poor Coralie! would she ever be able to forget? Her red lip was just trembling over the last cadence, and the final words of this beautiful *chant du soir,*

"*Ora, Mater, ora,*
Star of the deep,"

when Ninette burst into the room, exclaiming, "Oh! Miss, *can* you come to master? Thomas says he 's dying!"

"God forgive me! — and I *here!*" I cried, as I rose, and tottered toward her. "I 'm coming — help me, girl; no, tell Pierre to fly this instant for Dr. Dupont. I 'll go to my father myself — run, child, and make haste back!"

"Cannot I help you? cannot I do *something?* Let *me* go, Henri — dearest Henri," pleaded Coralie. She called me "Henri," still. I remember it now, as though it happened only yesterday.

"Not now, my darling; not yet — my father never sees strangers there: you will see him when he grows better. But will you assist me to his door?" I added, for I felt so nervous, that it was with difficulty I could stand at all. She placed her round, white arms about me, and, thus supported, I hastened forward, as fast as my trembling limbs would permit, toward my father's room. At the door Coralie left me, and I entered alone. Thomas was on the floor, supporting his master in his arms; our poor invalid had fainted quite away.

"Lay him back in bed — can you lift him?" I asked, hurriedly, as I saw the position of affairs. Thomas raised the attenuated form apparently with as much ease as he would have carried that of a child, and laid him gently back in his bed.

"He *would* get up, Miss," explained the servant. "He said young master would be home to-night, and you would all be going from town in a day or two; and he *mus'* get up and walk a little to 'custom himself to the exercise. He 'd been lying abed quite too long already, he said. But, bless you, Miss," continued the poor fellow, as his voice broke down to a tremulous and husky whisper, "bless you! Miss, he *could n't* walk a step. He just fell forward on the floor like a log, Miss — like a log. I riz him

up; and you see, Miss, he was mos' gone — like a dead man mos', Miss. Poor master! I feared he 'll never git up no more at all. What do *you* think, mistus?" and he looked eagerly into my face, as if to read there something of comfort and hope.

"*I* think we must bestir ourselves, and that quickly — hoping for the best while we work. Get me some brandy," I answered, as I busied myself applying restoratives. After half an hour of vigorous work, most of which had to be done by Thomas and Ninette, under my direction, I had the inexpressible satisfaction of seeing my patient's eyes slowly and wearily unclose; a slight tremor shook his whole frame; then he looked up at me wistfully, and tried to speak. He could not articulate; I bent down, and, pressing my lips to his, said: "Don't try to talk now. You will be better presently. Here comes Eugene — he can do wonders, you know." At the same time I heard footsteps on the gallery, which I knew were Eugene's; I heard also quite a bustle and commotion in the great hall below — or, perhaps, it seemed to me, a very unusual noise, as the house was now kept so quiet. Ninette had run down to the housekeeper's room for articles we needed, and now returned. My heart gave a great bound. "Is it your Mas' Sigismond?" I asked, in a hurried whisper.

"Oh! no, mademoiselle. The porters are bringing Mademoiselle Coralie's trunks and things," she replied in the same tone. "The man they call Jean — he has his right arm in a sling — says that Madame Lesueur sent you word that she is going away soon, for the rest of the summer, and she wants Miss Coralie to stay with you till she comes back."

"Ah! yes — I understand that. Now make haste with the mustard. Give me the scissors — you are not quick enough." Ninette laughed as she gently put aside my one

hand, and with deft fingers went on with her plasters. Just then Dr. Dupont entered.

"*You* here!" he exclaimed, *sotto voce*, as he caught my extended hand. (It was wonderful how much in requisition seemed that one hand!) "Why, this will never, *never* do; you will be 'laid up' entirely. It is too much for you — quite too much."

"Never mind me, doctor; go to my father — try everything to raise him," I whispered. His countenance grew exceedingly grave, as he bent over the sick man, and placed his fingers upon the feeble and fluttering pulse. Then he administered some medicine — continued our efforts to restore the circulation — and in about an hour my father appeared much relieved. He spoke to me feebly: "I am weak, my dear — very weak — I tried —"

"Yes — yes — *mon cher père*, I know it all. You are very tired, and cannot talk now. By-and-by you will tell me; but if you could sleep now, it would be best."

He closed his eyes like a child, and after some fifteen or twenty minutes, I saw that he slept. I called Eugene's attention to the fact. "It is well," he said; "the potion I gave has taken effect. Sleep is the very best medicine for him now."

"You think him very ill — dangerously ill?"

"I will not conceal it from you, my friend — he is. It is my opinion that he will never be able to leave the city, as you contemplated."

"And how — what is the trouble? He has complained of no pain; and, until very lately, would not allow that he was ill at all."

"He has felt pain, nevertheless. He is worn away by pain of some kind, mademoiselle. He has suffered intensely, I know — I can *see* this in its effects — still, he has complained but little, even to me," replied the doctor.

"But where is the disease — and what is it? You can tell *me*, Eugene," I said, in a hurried whisper.

"*Heart pain. Douleur du cœur*, I think," he uttered in a low voice; then added, "I confess to you frankly, as I did once before, that I do not really understand the case. So far as I can judge, the malady is a mental one — it has worn out the physical man. I can do little for him, because I am unable to 'cleanse the bosom of that perilous stuff which weighs upon the heart.'"

"*Oui dà!* It may be so — it may indeed be so," I said, slowly, to myself.

"But now, *ma chère amie*," continued Dr. Dupont, "he is doing very well — much better than I anticipated when I first came in, I assure you. He will probably sleep some hours under the influence of the medicine I have given. I have found that he has been accustomed to heavy anodynes. Meanwhile, dear lady, you must not remain here. Remember that you too are upon my list of invalids."

"No," I answered, half smiling, "I am not an invalid. I shall have a comfortable sofa brought in, and watch by my father through the night. Sigismond will be here before the day dawns — the boat comes in at four o'clock."

"And what do you suppose Sauvollée will do when he finds that I have allowed this? I wonder that a fever has not set in already from your wound — you are so restless; nay, almost reckless," expostulated Eugene.

"Oh! you need not 'allow' me to do anything," I replied. "I am doing everything *despite you* — you understand; and Sigismond cannot be ungenerous enough to attach any blame to you. He brought me up to have a 'constitution.' You say people are hard to kill who are possessed of a strong 'will to live;' and so I shall resist your 'fever,' *monsieur le docteur*. Here I am going to remain, at all events: rest assured of that, *mon ami*." I spoke

cheerfully, almost gayly, though, Heaven knows, my heart was sad enough. But I would not give up; I would not let him see how nervous and shaken in spirit I really felt, lest he should order me off to my room immediately, and leave me no appeal.

"At least retire now, for an hour or two," urged Eugene. "I would insist upon taking your place, but I am compelled to go round to Tchoupitoulas Street, to see a bad case. They sent for me just as Pierre came into my office. Were it not for this, I would remain myself."

"Oh, I shall do very well. Thomas and Ninon are both with me; I can arouse them at any moment. But you must come again as soon as you can get away. Come before morning, if you can."

"I shall do so, certainly. And now, *bon soir* for a few hours. Have your sofa brought in, since you *will*, and then go to sleep on it — mind *that*. *Au revoir;*" and I was left to myself.

In a few minutes I had everything arranged. Thomas and Ninon brought in a light sofa, and set it down softly, near my father's bed. He still slept — so still, that at times I could scarce discover that he breathed at all. I opened the venetian doors, to allow the air to enter — for the night was close and sultry — adjusted the light properly, drew the filmy lace curtains carefully round the sleeper, then laid myself down among the pillows on my sofa. Some time passed. Everything seemed so calm and peaceful, and my father slept so well, that I dismissed Ninette to her slumbers, and told Thomas that he might also retire to the anteroom adjoining, where he always slept, that he might be near his master. Then I was left alone. All was still as death in the chamber, and nothing could be heard from without, save now and then a distant rumbling of wheels, or a soft rustle, as the light breeze occasionally whispered

through the vines that partially latticed the gallery. I lay with half-closed eyes, my head pillowed upon the arm of the sofa, and facing the doors that opened on the gallery. I did not feel at all like sleeping—I was thinking. I was "putting this and that together," as people say. My thoughts intruded upon forbidden ground, perhaps; but then they were only my own thoughts, and went no farther. A woman may think, I suppose; more especially, if she keeps her "thinkings" to herself. Suddenly, I became aware that a white figure stood just beyond the doorway, in the half-gloom without, looking in upon me. One bound—awkward enough, I imagine, but stronger, perhaps, than might have been anticipated from my state of health—brought me to my feet in the middle of the floor. I advanced—the figure advanced also out of the shadow, and we met upon the threshold. Two arms went round me—it was Coralie.

"Why, Henri! did I startle you?" she whispered. "I did not mean it. But I cannot sleep, and I felt impelled to come to you. See this! Madame sent it with my trunks and packages." And she held up that broken picture, wrapped in the letter.

"Not now—not now!" I shivered, as I hid my face on her shoulder. "I cannot look at them just now!"

"I have looked at them until they have 'murdered sleep' for me," she said, softly; "and I felt as though I must come to you. Did you not call me?"

"No, *chère petite;* but I was thinking strongly of you, and of this very picture and letter. I am glad Madame sent them to you."

"Yes—because they are mine. You were thinking of them and me, and so drew me to you. Your thoughts called me, and I came. Now that I am here, will you not

allow me to watch awhile, until you lie down and take some rest? You need it sadly, dearest Henri."

"No — no; I don't wish to sleep. Hark! what hour is that?" We listened — the hall clock struck eleven. The house and the night were so still that the bell-like tones of the clock sounded to me like an alarum. "What a noise that was! When that clock strikes twelve, it will be certain to awaken my father," I said. "I must go down and stop it."

"Well, if you think it necessary; and I will watch here till your return," said Coralie. "But no — you cannot get up and down stairs well: let me go — I can do it."

"No, *ma chère;* thank you. I think I understand the old timepiece better than you. I will waken Ninon, and she can assist me. Step in to my sofa, there, and wait for me; I shall be gone only a few moments. Is there a light in my room?"

"Yes — on the table. I left it there, hoping that I might induce you to go and lie down for a while in your own bed."

"I shall be back directly," I said, as I went out; and she glided noiselessly to the sofa which I had quitted.

I crept along the gallery and through the hall to my own chamber. The light was burning on the console. I took it up, and went into the dressing-room to waken Ninette. The girl, wearied out with much anxiety and waiting on me, lay coiled up on her little couch, soundly sleeping. She had not undressed, expecting to be called at any time. I really had not the heart to arouse her from so sweet a sleep. "Why, I can just as well go down myself," I muttered. "It would be needless to disturb the poor thing; she is tired. I can lean on the balustrade, and creep up and down well enough."

I took up my light, then, and went to the landing. The

hall-lamp, with its rose-glow, had gone out. "Why in the world has Pierre turned off the gas so early?" I exclaimed, pettishly; "when he knows that his young master is to be home to-night, too. I must see to this." Then down I crept, holding by the balustrade, until I reached the hall below. No sound save the loud, persistent ticking of the large clock. I stopped it; and then it occurred to me that the gas ought to be lighted again immediately; Eugene might come in at any time. I had a candle, and thought I could do it myself. The rose-colored globe hung above my head, but by pushing a large chair that stood near directly under it, I could manage to reach it, I thought, quite well. With some difficulty I accomplished this; with more, I had clambered into the chair, and stood reaching up to turn on the gas, when — God of heaven! the terrible, tortured, unearthly shriek that burst above me! Another! and yet another! They froze the very life-blood in my veins. I reeled — fell. The light dropped from my nerveless hand — went out — and I lay there, prone upon the floor, and in utter darkness. Another, and yet another of those soul-harrowing cries from above — and I staggered to my feet. How I got up stairs again I never knew; frenzy seemed to drive me forward. In the gallery I was caught up by the trembling and breathless Ninette, whose teeth chattered as she exclaimed:

"Holy Mother of Christ! did you hear it, Miss?"

"What — what is it?" I gasped.

"Saints help us! your father is seeing of the spirits!" uttered the girl. I had reached the door of his room, and — God aid us! — what a sight presented itself to my shocked senses! Coralie, pale as ashes, stood cowering amid the gossamer curtains at the foot of the bed, seemingly deprived of all life and volition by the force of some frightful fascination; my father sitting bolt upright in

the bed, rigid as stone, his hands flung wildly out, as if to fend off some horrible spectre, his eyes glaring with the unnatural look of a dumb animal mad with terror. Oh! my stricken soul! 't was horrible — horrible!

The whole household, awakened and alarmed by those terrible cries, was hastening to the spot. Breaking through the terrified servants, I threw myself on the bed beside my father, wound my arms around him, and endeavored to soothe and gently force him back to his pillows. "Take her away — take her away — in the name of God!" he shivered, as he put those stiffened, feeble arms about my neck, and sank back, shuddering, in my embrace.

"Coralie, my darling, come to me — come away," I said, in as calm a voice as I could command.

"*Coralie! Coralie!*" he shrieked again. "You know the ghost, then — you know she has come up from the dead to curse me when I 'm dying. Coralie? yes — it is she — I knew it! She has come to curse me with the curse of the dead, and (here his whole frame shook, and his face grew livid) with *the curse of the — betrayed!*"

Oh! that a just God could have spared me this hour! It flashed over me in an instant again — the remembrance of that dreadful presentiment which had so shaken my soul when I cowered down and hid my face from the crape-shrouded picture of my father which hung in my sleeping-chamber. I saw it all in a moment — it struck my brain like a lightning flash! My fearful conjecturings, when I lay "putting this and that together," had proved true. I knew *now*, by a terrible, irresistible intuition, the original of that little broken picture — the writer of that mutilated letter! *My own father* lay there before me, branded as the betrayer of innocence — the murderer of his victim — and *Coralie his child!* My brain reeled with this stunning conviction; and yet I hastened to confirm it. Taking up

Coralie's icy hand, I laid it on his forehead, saying, in low, faltering tones, "It is no spirit, my father; it is flesh and blood. *Your* flesh and blood — and mine!"

His eyes were strained and wild, his lips quivering convulsively, his face ashen as the clay. "Who — who is it?" he gasped, in a dazed, bewildered way. I smoothed his brow with my single hand, and laid him back on the pillows. Coralie had moved away at my call, from the foot of the bed. I gave him a stimulant, and dismissed all the wondering servants who stood at the door, with the exception of Thomas and Ninon; then I sat down beside him on the bed, and as briefly and quietly as possible made him understand Coralie's history, and why she was here in our house. His conscience helped him to comprehend my rather hurried and disjointed narrative. I had scarcely finished, when he stretched forth eagerly his feeble arms, exclaiming, "*My* Coralie! *my* child!" The white, rigid figure standing near me fell forward into those arms; the marble face, and the bright head, with its curls of gold, lay buried on the bosom of *her* father, and *mine!* When at last I raised her up, her eyes wore a still, stony look, that appalled me. I knew that though overpowered by the first recognition of a *father's love*, the "still, small voice" of a *mother's wrongs* was already at work in her heart. I threw my arms around her neck, pressed a long and loving kiss upon her cold lips, and whispered, "My darling — *my sister!*" Ah! then the stony spell was broken — then gushed the soft, sweet rain of tears, and our hearts in that moment "grew together" in a holy union, nevermore to be sundered — in a glowing love, never, never to be lost. Together we stood beside our dying father, and, with a sudden start of recollection, Coralie held out to him the little picture and letter, which had remained all this time in her clenched hand. He grasped them eagerly, though I had put out my

hand to prevent it, fearing it would be too much for him in his present state. But he had quickly grasped those relics of a bygone day, and as his straining eyes devoured them, I saw that he was terribly shaken. The light fell upon them full and soft; and his hand shook so that he could not have studied them had they been strange to him. But he knew them far too well to make *that* necessary.

"*They are mine,*" he uttered, tremulously, after a long, long pause. "Thomas!"—and his faithful servitor came and leaned a moment over him—"bring me the ebony box—Thomas!—and get the little casket for me."

Thomas went back to a large old-fashioned armoire, or secretary, which stood in one corner of the apartment; from this he brought an octagonal ebony box, inlaid with pearl, and placed it on the table. Then going to his master again, he bent over him, and took from his neck a slender golden chain, to which was attached a delicate key. With this he opened the box, and taking thence a beautiful little silver *écrire,* handed it to his master. My father raised the lid, and a moment after laid in my hand another little picture and a piece of folded paper. I took up both pictures and held them to the light, Coralie looking on with me. They were halves of the same double locket—there was the broken hinge, the spring, the wreath of forget-me-nots on each: in the one we had not heretofore seen was an angel face—the image of *my* Coralie; and on the back was inscribed, in letters similar to those upon the other picture, "Coralie, June 1st, 1834." The loop was attached to this half of the medallion, and as I placed them together, the tiny spring closed with a soft click, as it doubtless had been used to do in days gone by. These, then, were the semblances of *our* father and of Coralie's mother. When these pictures were taken, where was *my own* mother, the fair and fragile beauty, Pauline de

Hauterive? This "*June* 1*st*, 1834," was the day of her death: the day of my *sister* Coralie's birth. Alas for our beautiful mothers, both had their wrongs, and both were dead under them! I will not say that this thought did not awaken in my soul a sudden feeling of bitterness toward the man who had wronged them both; no, I felt for a moment intense bitterness toward that dying man — may Heaven pardon me! My thoughts were all of the two bright young lives, wrecked forever by the misdeeds of one who had long survived them. I knew not, then, how he had also made shipwreck of his own life, repenting through the tortures of desert years.

Mechanically I was placing the two pieces of paper together, in the same manner as the pictures. My father was gazing steadfastly at me, as though he would read my very soul. I am quite sure that he divined my feelings toward him.

"Read it," he said, in a hoarse whisper. I placed the pieces together — it was the same thick vellum, with an embossed border — pieces of the same sheet they were — and the letter they formed ran thus:

"Keep the enclos ed, my loved Coralie, until I can come with full power to claim you. Our child! I give you a thousand kisses for her. Still believe the deep devotion of my soul; for my whole soul is centred in you. I'll prove it my own one—soon, very soon. Trust — and await me this evening.

Devoted ly evermore

Your HENRI."

Coralie was reading it with me, her head bowed and both hands grasping my arm. "Surely — surely, he must

have loved her well," she whispered, in a scarcely audible voice, as I folded up the papers. I laid them down, took her hand in mine, and pressed it fervently. She was not to blame if my mother was neglected; there could be no bitterness in my heart toward *her*. If the dying man who was lying there beside us had wronged my mother, he had still more deeply wronged hers; and I could feel for her even as I felt for myself. The old pride, so strong within me, struggled up then against that man, though I strove hard to crush it down — though I strove to master myself, and regard him, not as the impetuous, passionate, selfish man, who had bowed others to his will, but as the enfeebled, repentant, and dying father, who, *if he could*, would now right all the wrongs he had committed. Alas! alas! that there should be on earth no restitution — no righting of such wrongs as these! Alas! that of such wrong as he had wrought, the consequences should be inevitable, and also irremediable! There was a bitter feeling at my heart — a burning, gnawing pain. I would have given worlds to weep, but tears were now denied me. Ah! how wretched, how very wretched was this humiliating revelation of my mother as a wronged, neglected, and deserted wife! And I had loved — had longed for the affection of this man, who had thus wronged and deserted her!

Hark! that was a ring at the door-bell: Eugene had come. I raised myself, and looked around to see if anything must be arranged before his entrance. There was quite a bustle in the hall below. Soon I heard a swift, strong step through the upper hall and along the gallery — that step I knew so well. It was not Eugene's. I flew toward the open door, and sank, quite overpowered at last, upon the strong heart of Sigismond!

CHAPTER XVIII.

TELLE VIE, TELLE MORT.

Oh, June-day friend, that helps me now at night,
When June is over!
Could I see his face,
I wept so? Did I drop against his breast,
Or did his arms constrain me? Were my cheeks
Hot, overflooded with my tears, or his?
And which of our two large, explosive hearts
So shook me? That, I know not.

MRS. BROWNING.

I've seen a thousand horrid shapes, begot of fierce extremes
Of fever; and most frightful things have haunted in my dreams —
Hyenas and blood-loving bats, and apes with hateful stare —
Pale, sheeted ghosts, with gory locks, upstarting from the tombs —
All phantasies and images, that flit in midnight glooms.

HOOD.

IT were idle now to dwell at length upon the many conflicting feelings which possessed us by turns on that eventful night of Wednesday, 16th of June, 1852. It were idle now to recall in detail my emotions upon the acknowledgment of Coralie as my sister, or my joy at the return of Sigismond, my "good genius." I must not at present deal so much with feelings as with facts. It was a moment of blissful rest, of encouragement, and of consolation to me — the moment when I lay folded to the strong, throbbing heart of *mon bon ami;* when I felt those protecting arms encircle me again; when I heard the deep and mellow voice once more murmur, lovingly, "*M'amour! Vie de mon cœur! Dieu vous bénisse!*"

Nor was I at all surprised to find, now that the necessity for my standing and acting alone had departed, how all my woman's nature went forth to him in a gush of glad and grateful dependence; nor (you see I am not ashamed to confess it!) how very, very sweet was that consciousness of dependence and *rest* to my tired heart. I, who before his coming felt weighed down by conflicting emotions — mentally stunned into a state *plus mort que vif*, as it were — now came back to myself, with the added strength of *another* self; as though I had received from the magnetic clasp of his hand and pressure of his lip the stimulus of some subtle *éssence de la vie.*

I led him in to my father's bedside, and the sudden shade which passed upon his countenance revealed at once the shock he experienced upon witnessing the great change which had taken place during his absence. The decline had really not been so rapid as it appeared, because my father possessed a strong and determined *will*, which kept him up until nature was exhausted, and he was compelled to succumb. By strong efforts of will he had always braced himself to the task of meeting us of late, and he was really weak and ill long before we discovered it. But when he was no longer able to make these efforts — when he was compelled to acknowledge his illness — he sank rapidly, and we could see it. The first greetings interchanged between Sigismond and my father, the former turned to Coralie with a surprise only modified by courtesy. Certainly he had no idea of finding her domesticated in our home on his return. She stood, like a snow image, at the head of the bed, holding her father's thin hand, the cloud-like curtains falling at her back, and half-veiling the beautiful head, with all its gold "abandonment of curls." She was pale, still, and self-centred. The sweet face wore an expression of deepest melancholy.

"Receive her as my daughter, Monsieur Sauvollée," said my father, in a feeble voice. Sigismond did not start as she gave him her hand; evidently, he did not seize upon the true meaning of my father's words. As he cordially welcomed the lovely, half-shrinking girl to the home in which he had so long dwelt as a loved and honored son, I saw that he had no conception of the real purport of the remark. He saw in Coralie only the blameless young wanderer reinstated in her proper sphere, and installed in our home as its adopted daughter; but that she was such in reality, he did not then dream. Even to me, it seemed scarcely more than a dream — a vision of some hour of glamour, from which I should soon awake, finding it flown forever, leaving "not a wreck behind." Only a fortnight had elapsed since the day we first saw Coralie's semblance at Moisinett's rooms; and now she was here at my side, the acknowledged daughter of my own father! What fantasies of fate had held possession of me during that fierce fortnight! Sigismond was all anxiety to hear how I had won my *protégée* — I could see that — while he gave my father brief assurances that during his tour he had obeyed instructions, and arranged all business affairs satisfactorily: the state of the invalid did not admit of his going into details. I sat on the sofa, facing him, as he spoke to my father; suddenly he came to me, and said, in a low tone, "You are very pale; you look almost ill. What is it, *fleur-de-lis?* Are you weary? I am as anxious to talk to you as I have been to meet you, but I will not ask any information to-night; you seem so tired. I am in more than two hours earlier than I expected — the 'Gipsy' made a good run down — it was not two o'clock when I came up. If you will retire now with your friend, I will watch here until morning. Will you go, 'heart's-ease?' You need rest, I am sure."

I shook my head. "Then," he asked, "will you come with me for a few minutes to the gallery?" I looked at Coralie. "Go—I will remain here," she said, in a whisper. The invalid was lying quite still, his eyes closed; I know not whether or not he slept. I rose softly and went with Sigismond. "I have been literally 'perishing' to talk to you. How did it all come about? In your letters you never said a word of Coralie's being here, and my astonishment at seeing her almost upset my politeness," said he, as I sat down on the long settee which stood between the columns, in front of my father's room. "And what a marked change in your father!—how did this happen? *Dût-il m'en coûter la vie*, I cannot comprehend what you have all been doing in my absence," he added, seating himself by my side. Briefly then I ran over the rapid succession of incidents which had resulted in the removal of Coralie to our house. My recital was succinct and hurried; there was nothing in it of the triumph and self-gratulation with which I had imagined I would relate it to him. There was only a grateful gladness that she was saved, and that she was now our own, mingled with a sweet content that he was here when we so greatly needed him. When I told him of my own suffering, his arms—those resolute, protecting arms—stole round me, as if to ward off even the remembrance of dangers past. When I spoke of Berthêl, I could hear his quickened breathing, and now and then a deep exclamation through his set teeth: when I mentioned, with a shudder, how nearly that keen knife came to striking home to my heart, he pressed me closer to him, with a low moan of irrepressible agony—his head was bowed to mine, he gave way utterly, and great sobs shook the strong man, as though he had been but a child. Otherwise he was silent, for language had no words to shadow forth the surge and swell of his soul. It was all so surprising, so strange,

and so terrible to him — the thought of what I had gone through — that he was completely overcome. I could not tell what feeling was regnant in the conflicting chaos of emotion which swept over him. It is doubtful if he could have told himself; for, notwithstanding his usual outward calm, his passions were strong, and his feelings profound. He had sunk to his knee beside me; my right arm was round his neck as he knelt; I laid my hand upon his face —it was wet with tears. We read much of the pathos, the soul-subduing influence which exists in woman's tears. Far more touching to the sight and sense, I think, are the heart-wrung tears a strong man weeps. There is, indeed, something of power in pathos, when we see the eye which glittered like a "sharp, sunlit sword," melting suddenly, and brimful of heart-dew; and that is a subduing influence, in truth, which lays the calm nobility of a man's nature, his high, generous temper, and his leonine courage, all at the feet of a tender and tearful grief. How well he loved me! I do not say that I was more worthy than any other; I was simply "all the world" to him. I knew even then that

> "A man may love a woman perfectly,
> And yet by no means ignorantly maintain
> A thousand women have not larger eyes:
> Enough that she alone has looked at him
> With eyes that, large or small, have won his soul."

I had finished my relation but a minute or two, when, in the deep silence that followed, I again heard steps approaching through the upper hall. Pierre appeared on the gallery with a light, and behind him came Eugene. We rose to meet him. Sigismond grasped both hands of his friend, exclaiming, "How can I ever sufficiently thank you?" Eugene understood him, and answered, with a

smile, "By remaining at home hereafter, and attending *une belle demoiselle*, who is slightly self-willed, especially when indulging an odd passion which she has *pour faire le monsieur*. I confess to a deep admiration for this young gentleman, *au printemps de ses jours* — a cavalier *du bon ton* — not the slightest *air de province* about him; yet I have to acknowledge that he has given me any amount of feverish anxiety. He is as reckless as he is self-willed. *Belle amie*," he added, turning to me, "I now resign you to your proper guardian, who, if he possesses only one-half the discretion and authority I give him credit for, will dismiss you to your room at once. But," and he dropped his gay, bantering tone suddenly, "what of my patient — your father?" I pointed through the open doorway. Coralie still sat on the bedside, at my father's pillow, and his position was unchanged, save that his face was turned more toward her.

"Sleeping?" asked Eugene.

"I think so; and yet I scarcely dare hope that it is a natural sleep. He is utterly exhausted by emotion — quite worn away — " I could say no more.

"Yes," remarked the doctor, "you are right. His life *ne tient plus qu'à un fil* — a mere thread, which may be broken by a breath. Do you recognize this? Madame Lesueur sent it to you; and that imperious-looking sultana whom she called Marguerite sent this." He handed me two packages.

Wonderingly I opened first Marguerite's — it contained the two pictures, one of herself and one of Coralie, which had first attracted our attention at Moisinett's gallery. On a small slip of paper between them was written four words: "Keep until called for." I opened the second paper — it contained my watch and chain. Eugene, anticipating my surprised inquiries, said, "Madame Lesueur sent it — Jules Berthêl died at her house about an hour since."

"Jules Berthêl — *dead!*" I uttered.

"How came it? Was it — the effect —" Here Sigismond looked at me and hesitated. He would not risk wounding my feelings by finishing the question.

"Oh! Eugene!" I broke forth, "you will not say it! It was *not* the effect of that pistol-shot!"

"Calm yourself, *belle amie* — I will be candid," he replied, slowly, and as if considering his words. "The shot did not kill him; that is to say, it could not have killed him of itself. It is useless to deny, however, that it hastened his death. And, I must say, you were altogether justifiable in giving him the shot, even had it proved immediately fatal. Berthêl has been his own worst enemy — his career of dissipation commenced three years ago. For some time he was upheld by his family, but for a year, at least, he has been going down rapidly, killing himself by degrees daily; and my only wonder is that he has not succeeded in completing the work long ere this. You may remember that when we left the 'Maison des Bijoux' on Tuesday evening, I told the Madame that her guest would soon be deep in delirium tremens. It came on before midnight, and since that time he has been in inexpressible tortures."

"Did you go there to see him, yourself?" I asked.

"Yes; I left here to visit a man in Tchoupitoulas Street. I had not reached my patient before a messenger from Duplanche followed me — summoning me to M. Berthêl. Just as soon as I could leave, I obeyed the call. I found M. Berthêl a dying man. The deserted house was filled with his shrieks and ravings. The room which he had occupied above-stairs was close and small, and Duplanche had had him removed — carried down stairs to that large apartment which they call the '*salon*.' His bed stood in the middle of the room, and three stout fellows were hold-

ing him down upon it when I entered. His groans, curses, and blasphemous ribaldry made me shiver, accustomed as I am to such scenes. All the thousand spectres of that awful malady were about him, and his sufferings were frightful. I have seen a score of such cases, but his exceeded in intense agony anything that I have ever witnessed. The contrast between his condition and the brilliant-looking pleasure-saloon where he lay, was a lesson in itself — with a weight of meaning in it sufficient to strike the most reckless and conscience-seared of men.

"'*Feu d'enfer!*' he exclaimed, as soon as his wild eyes fell upon me. '*Donnez moi de l'eau de vie.* This it is — *mourir de soif;* this it is — *brûler vif!* It is not well *se jeter dans le feu, pour éviter la fumée, ma belle ange déchu!* But I killed her — killed her, *veuille Dieu — veuille le diable!*' He was referring to you then, I am confident. I shall never forget the horrid cry with which he caught up a drinking-glass half-full of brandy, which Duplanche's man handed him, and ere his keepers were aware of his intent, flung it into a costly mirror directly opposite, shrieking that it was filled with grinning devils, and he would give them some of the hell-broth from which he was burning alive. His terrors of the apes and serpents, which he insisted were gliding in crowds over his bed, was intense and most pitiable. He would shout for brandy to set them aflame; and while the foam dropped in gouts from his jaws, he would gnash his teeth and snap at his keepers like some rabid creature in the last stages of canine madness. At last the final struggle came, when he seemed to have forgotten persons, and gave no sign that he recognized any of us. He only said, as if groping in thick gloom, '*Plongé dans le ténebrès!*' and the vexed spirit went out, in truth, upon 'the unknown Dark.'"

"Had he no friend near — none of his family?" asked Sigismond.

"Not one. His father had been sent for, but did not reach the house until all was over — and that was best. Think of such a sight for a father's love — a parent's pride, to witness! Ah! Sauvollée, it was horrible. I cannot express to you my feelings at seeing a human creature dying in such a state; the memory of it will haunt me forever."

"You spoke of the deserted house: is Marguerite still there?" I inquired.

"I presume so; though I only saw her for a moment. When I came out of the '*salon*,' she was standing at the door of the parlor — the room in which you were lying when I was called in, on Tuesday morning. She advanced and placed that package in my hand, with the request that I should deliver it to you — then, without even a '*bon soir*,' retired and shut the door. Madame Lesueur came into the '*salon*' after Duplanche announced to her that M. Berthêl was dead. She took possession of your watch when he was removed from the room above-stairs — and brought it to me as soon as she received the news of his death."

"Does she propose leaving that place?" questioned Sigismond.

"I believe she thinks of going away after Berthêl's body has been removed. The inmates of the house seemed to be all flown, like summer birds before the autumn storm."

"You saw the father of M. Berthêl?"

"Only for a few moments — he had just arrived. He will take home the remains of his son on to-morrow evening's boat — at least, so I understood," answered Dr. Dupont.

"What a burden for a father to bear to his home," I uttered. "*Telle vie, telle mort* —"

CHAPTER XIX.

DEATH.

Pauline — Pauline!
The grass upon her grave is green;
'T is drear, and desolate to-day
As the sad heart that could not pray
For the dead hopes that on it lay —
Pauline — Pauline!

MARY E. BRYAN.

She sleeps that calm and pleasant sleep
For which the weary pant in vain,
And where the dews of summer weep
I may not weep again —
Ah! never, never on her grave
Shall I behold the wild flower wave!

Age sits upon my breast and brain,
My spirit fades before its time,
But — I am all thine own again,
Lost life-star of my early prime:
Oh! for a refuge and a home
With thee, dead Beauty, in the tomb!

OLD SONG.

I HAD no time to finish that sentence reflecting upon a foe whose enmity was now forever past; for an exclamation of terror from Coralie within, recalled us to the present. Sigismond sprang to his feet, lifted me, and we hurried in. One glance at my father confirmed my worst fears. The stillness, which might have been mistaken for slumber, was rather utter exhaustion. In his enfeebled,

helpless state, the terrible excitement consequent upon the appearance of Coralie — his wild thoughts at first impressing upon him the idea that it was the spirit of her whom he had betrayed — and then the recognition of his long-lost child, had been too much for him. He was sinking rapidly — his hours, nay, his moments, were numbered.

"Give him stimulants — it is all we can do," said Eugene, handing me a glass which he had quickly prepared — for at a glance he saw that a few hours, at most, were all he could promise the patient. Sigismond upheld my father in his arms, while I gave him the potion. He looked up at us appealingly, and feebly taking my wounded hand, strove to place it in that of Coralie, who stood beside me. She took mine in both hers, placed her tremulous lips upon it, and we stood thus linked together by his side. He was striving to speak to us — and I will endeavor to give the substance of that feeble, faltering, and disjointed utterance. At times his slow words, always spoken with an effort, would cease altogether; then he would motion to me, and again I would give him the stimulant.

"It is well," he said, in that painful, broken way; and regarding us both with eyes from which the light of life was fast fading. "It is well — you will love one another. Henriette, my noble child, you have done all that earthly power can do to redeem the consequences of your father's crime. Alas! that it could not *all* be redeemed! Here are my children — but where is my wife, the fair and fragile Pauline? Where my first, my dearest love, the beautiful Coralie? Gone — both long since gone! And where are my own weary, wasted years — my lifetime of remorse and still despair? Almost gone also — and were it not for the unknown hereafter, I could thank God that it is so nearly gone. My moments grow brief, my children, and it is well that I have but few words to say. As regards

the things of this world, I leave you both amply provided for. My will — made at least two years ago — devises all properties to you, my eldest daughter and rightful heir; but I am persuaded that the sister for whose sake you have dared and suffered so much, will be well provided for and amply dowered by you. I am thankful to know this; because, in consideration of the deep wrongs of both your mothers, this dying hour would be to me a thousand times more bitter, did I leave their children in penury and obscurity to battle with the world. A few words as regards those mothers, that you may learn how wronged, and how innocent they were — for I — I alone — am guilty. I was an only son — a wild and wilful youth; and, my mother dying in my infancy, I was brought up by an indulgent father. On arriving at my majority, I found that my father's estate had melted away under my reckless dissipations, and needed to be replenished. My father urged this necessity, and, wayward as I was — this was one point upon which I could agree with him — I *must* have money. Life was nothing to me without it. The means of replenishing my almost exhausted coffers lay within my reach. Pauline d'Herbelot, our neighbor's only daughter, was the heiress of great wealth; she was very young, of a frail, fairy-like beauty — and she loved me. There was but one barrier in the way of our union: with the headlong passion of my hot-hearted youth I already loved another — Coralie Eslington, the lovely daughter of an English widow, residing near Baton Rouge. I have no time now, my children, to enter into details — suffice it, that I married Pauline publicly — and, some time afterward, married the woman I loved — privately. You will understand that this marriage was only intended to deceive *her* — it was a mock marriage, and, of course, an illegal one; but it deceived my trusting victim — she believed herself in reality

my lawful wife. The seclusion in which she and her mother lived, favored my schemes. I resided at that time with my wife — Pauline — at our pleasant villa on the banks of the Mississippi, in the parish of Ascencion; but 'business' often compelled me to visit Baton Rouge. I had a confidential servant, Manuel, whom I brought from New Orleans — he had something of Spanish or Mexican blood in his veins. This servant passed back and forth between Coralie and myself, as a courier, for I would trust no communications to the post. Nearly three years had passed away since my marriage with Pauline, in which no suspicion of my treachery seemed ever to disturb her peace of mind. As to Coralie, whom I had afterward betrayed — her trust in me was perfect. I treated Pauline with consideration, was courteous and attentive to her as my wife — my conscience compelled me to it; but my fair, English rose was loved with a deep and passionate tenderness, and a wild fervor that had in it somewhat of madness. The few hours I would at intervals pass with her at the secluded little bower of a home where she dwelt with her mother and one aged domestic, were hours of rapture, worth risking life itself to win. She was happy — very happy in my love — and easily imposed upon by the story of a relentless father who had opposed our union, but whose death one day would leave me free to claim her as my wife in the face of all the world. She *was* my wife — so she imagined — and in her great love for me, she was content. Need I say it was not my father's death for which I waited? I dared to look upon the lily-like Pauline and anticipate the day when, possessed of all her wealth, I should set my rose of beauty in her vacant place.

"Meanwhile, Manuel was growing arrogant. He knew the power he possessed in the secret which he held, and, forgetting his position as my paid tool and slave, he began

to ask for extra moneys and indulgences. In a careless and indulgent way, I for some time gratified him by granting his requests; but at length, emboldened by my kindness, he made a heavy demand, which I not only refused to grant, but threatened him with punishment. I then sent him with a message to Coralie, bidding him remain until she wished him to return, and cautioning him to remember his position in future.

"Two days after, he came with a hurried message from Coralie — *our child* was sleeping on her bosom — I must come! He left her early in the morning, and he reached me about noon — but his horse died soon after his arrival, killed by hard riding. Again my courier urged his extravagant demand. In my excited state, scarce knowing what I did, I struck him a violent blow across the face. He staggered back, and, with a sullen and cowed expression, left my presence. Shortly after, however, I went to seek him. I had, some time previous, had Coralie's miniature painted, and also my own. These pictures I sent to a jeweller in New Orleans, had them placed together in a medallion, the inscriptions dated on the day when I thought it probable I would present it to her. This was my opportunity: I would send Manuel to announce my coming. I hastily wrote a note — that torn and time-worn letter which you read together, my children — made a small package of the note and the medallion, and sought Manuel. I gave it into his hands, ordered him to take the fleetest horse in my stables and return to Coralie at once, saying to her that I would take the New Orleans packet, which passed an hour or two hence, and be there soon after his arrival. I then left the house. My excitement knew no bounds. It was the first of June, the day on which you, my Henriette, completed your second year, and Pauline was busy with her preparations for a little fête in honor of your natal day. She had

summoned me to be present; but how was I, the father of another child born that day, to enter upon these rejoicings on the birthday of hers? All my coolness, all my forethought, all command of myself seemed to have utterly forsaken me. My wild love for Coralie, and my knowledge of her sufferings — my remorse when I thought upon Pauline, and upon you, my innocent Henriette — drove me to the verge of distraction. I had no well-defined thought, save that I *must* go to Coralie, and that I *dared not* meet Pauline. I rushed from the house out into the fields, and paced for hours the greensward, under a grove of live-oaks near the levee. I was chafing with impatience — the steamer was much later than usual. At last she came in sight; I hailed her, and went on board, seeing no one, telling no one of my proposed absence. It was midnight when we reached Baton Rouge — past that time when I arrived at the embowered entrance of Coralie's dwelling. I knocked, and after repeating my knock more loudly several times, the door was opened by the mother. She appeared to have just risen from sleep, and placed her finger on her lip as I uttered my hurried inquiries for Coralie, saying, 'Hush! hush! my son, she is sleeping now; do not awake her. She and the sweet babe have been sleeping for more than an hour; and I, too, being so fatigued, lay down upon the sofa there, and fell off into a doze. Will you have some supper? You may go in when she awakes, but you must not disturb her at present; she will not sleep much longer: it is nearly nine o'clock now.'

"'Nearly nine!' I exclaimed. '*Ma chère maman*, you have overslept yourself — it is past midnight.'

"She looked at me with a strange, vacant stare; indeed, she seemed only partially aroused, even yet. 'Stand aside, *madame mère*,' I said; 'I cannot wait until *you* are properly awake. I must see my wife and child.' I tried the

chamber door as I spoke; it was locked on the inside! Remembering that out on the opposite side a wide bay-window opened to the ground, I ran out, and found it open. I entered; the room was in great disorder, but silent. A light which had been burning on the dressing-table, flared up a moment as I threw the sash more widely open, flickered, fell, and went out in darkness. I returned to the other room for a fresh light, procured it, and came back immediately. The curtains were drawn about the bed. I set down the lamp, and carefully unclosed the veils which were wont to guard my sleeping rose. Great God of heaven! the bed was tenantless — Coralie, nor her babe, was there!

"It is useless to tell you of the scene which followed. I raved at first, like any madman. Coralie was not to be found; but on her pillow lay the half of that note which I had sent her, wrapped around her own picture, which had been rudely broken from mine! No word — no sign beside! Next day I searched for her in vain. I went everywhere about the town — I instituted search in every imaginable way that I dared do and not expose myself. I found no clue; there was literally nothing — even 'no loop to hang a hope upon.' I was bewildered — mystified — maddened. The poor mother was heart-broken. The one domestic, who slept in another part of the house, knew nothing — had heard or seen nothing. Manuel was nowhere about the place. He had come (the mother informed me) late in the evening, and delivered the package to Coralie — said he had been commanded by me to return immediately — and rode away again, not even pausing to refresh himself or his horse, which was panting, and streaked with dust and foam. After his departure the mother had gone out to attend to some domestic arrangements, and, in probably half an hour, just as it was growing dusk, coming into the adjoining room, imagined she heard voices in Coralie's

chamber. Supposing that some neighbor had gone in, she opened the door. Coralie was there alone, and appeared to have almost fainted away. The mother hastened forward.

"'It is nothing — nothing — give me some water, mother,' she said, faintly. The mother gave it, from a pitcher that stood near. The sufferer took a small portion, and turned away her face, as though she wished to sleep. 'I had made her tea,' continued the poor woman, choking with her sobs, 'and I took it in immediately; but she was asleep: at least I thought so. Feeling thirsty, I took up the little pitcher of water and drained it dry. It struck me, after I had swallowed the draught, that it was no wonder my daughter drank but little; for it was not fresh, and had a slightly disagreeable taste — bitter like. After drinking it I took a cup of tea and a roll; then shortly I became very sleepy. Coralie and her babe were both sleeping — at least I think so. I put a light on the dressing-bureau, almost closed her chamber door, and lay down on the sofa there, just outside of it. I thought I could hear her if she stirred; but I knew no more until awakened by your knocking. I was so fearful you would awaken her. Oh, my child! my lost, lost child!' This story she would repeat over and over again, and then fall into fits of violent weeping and agitation."

Here my father's voice grew weaker and more husky; it was only with great effort that he could articulate so as to be understood. He motioned that Sigismond should lay him back again upon the pillows. It was done; and I again moistened his lips with the stimulant. He paused for a minute or two, in the endeavor, I thought, to rally his sinking energies, the deep stillness broken only by the shivering sobs of my sister Coralie. Tears dropped slowly over my face; but I wept in silence, my heart aching, in

its agony of impatience, for the remainder of my father's sad story. At last, in a voice so low that I was obliged to bend over him to catch the smothered sounds, he resumed: "A little more — I must say it now. Soon there will be silence — silence forever more." Then followed in broken sentences the remainder of his narrative, of which this is the substance:

"It was on the second day after Coralie's disappearance. I had returned from my weary search, worn and dispirited, when a common-looking countryman rode up to the gate, and demanded 'whether Monsieur de Hauterive was there?' I replied that I was the man. 'Then,' said he, 'I've a message for you, sir. I was coming along the road to town about a mile back, when a mulatto fellow, riding a fiery bay mare, overtook me. He directed me how to find this house, and if I found *you*, to say that "the madame, your wife, is dead, and you are wanted at home." He said too, "Tell him there's no use now hunting after what's at the bottom of the big river over yonder, and ask him if I've paid him that little account I owe him?"'

"'Describe that man to me,' I gasped; for a light flashed over me in an instant. He did so. It was Manuel! I saw it all: the treacherous villain had revenged himself by betraying me to Coralie. Heaven knows what he told her; the bare truth was sufficiently damning. Doubtless she, in a moment of frenzy, had drowned herself and child — and he knew it. This was my thought *then*, though I know now, from Madame Lesueur's story, that my Coralie was guiltless of the crime of suicide. With her death I alone am to blame — with that of her mother also, perhaps; for she died broken-hearted within a year. But I wander. The man rode away, and I began to think over the words of Manuel's message: 'The madame, your wife, is dead, and you are wanted at home.' *Home?* my

wife? could it be Pauline? Strange that at first I had not once thought of Pauline! I supposed he had meant Coralie, who he knew was drowned. But 'you are wanted *at home*' gave a new direction to my thoughts. Fortunately a steamer was advertised to leave in an hour. By ten o'clock that night I stood at the door of Pauline's chamber; she lay within, sleeping her last sleep.

"'When Manuel was here, on the day of the children's party,' (this was the account given by your nurse, my Henriette,) 'he said he had somethin' special to say to Madame Pauline; an' he went down into the garden, sir, where she was cuttin' of the flowers for the festoons. Everything was ready except fixin' of the fresh roses in the wreaths. She had got a bushel-basketful a'ready, an' Mima and me was fixin 'em in. Bime-by Manuel come back, got on his horse, an' rid off; and soon after that Madame Pauline, she come from the garden too, an' lookin' for all the world like as if she'd seed a ghost. "Is you sick, mistus?" I said; for I never seen her look so before. As she went by me, so white and still like, she said, "Attend to the children, nurse, until I come;" and then she went straight up to her room, and shut the door, an' *never* come out any more, sir. We waited an' waited, an' then I went an' knocked at her door, and got no answer. When the neighbor children come, we let 'em enjoy all the nice things she had fixed so proper for 'em; an', sir, when dark come on, an' little missy cried for her mamma, I jist could n't stand it no longer, sir. I got another key from Cely, unlocked her door, an' fore God, sir, thar she lay on her own white bed — *dead!* I reckon, sir, it must ha' been a heart-disease — it took her off so still and sudden, poor, dear lady! An' *you*, sir — we just tore this place up and down, and could n't find you *nowhar*. Bless God! you 's come at las'!'

"There she lay before me — the lily-like Pauline!

Manuel had done his work swiftly and surely — silently too, for the 'dead tell no tales.' I had set him the example of treachery and falsehood, and my lessons had recoiled upon my own head with a stunning force. My crime had met with swift and terrible retribution, and I could but confess that my punishment was just. I had often looked upon the fairy, fragile figure of my wife, and dared to think, 'One day she will fade from earth like a morning flower; then I shall be free to claim before the world my hidden rose of beauty. Pauline was even now asleep; but where was my radiant rose of love also? Sleeping too — gone — lost to me forever more!

"After I had examined closely all the apartments of my wife, I found no token by which I could infer that she herself had called down upon her own head the icy crown of death. Evidently that fatal discovery of my infidelity, treachery, and wrong had dealt the blow. She was a delicate creature physically; but she possessed a deep, devoted, generous nature, and she had loved me with her whole soul. I felt myself her murderer. I buried her, then returned to search for Coralie. It was vain — all vain. I never even heard of Manuel — never once in all those eighteen lonely, desolate, and despairing years. Great God! what ages of ceaseless misery and remorse those weary, weary, lingering years have been! They have been to me the sting of the 'worm that never dies.'

"I removed to New Orleans. Here for years I have buried myself in business; each year, however, becoming feeble, aged, and worn — less able to combat the fierce throes with which conscience assails me. Every fatal 'first of June' has been to me a step by which I have descended, lower and lower, to my death. Reckless and wayward as my youth has been, I could not plunge into the gross forgetfulness of intemperance; but I have sought relief for

years in the perishable nepenthe of the opium-draught. Can you wonder, my daughter, after all that I have said, that I should so long shrink from making you my confidante and companion? You were the child of Pauline, and, as such, an ever-present, poignant reproach to me. Can you wonder, either, that I shrank from allowing the skill and the clear-seeing, honest eyes of Eugene Dupont to search my mental with my physical disease? It is now too late — dread words for me — too late!"

The voice had sunk to a low, low murmur ere he paused, utterly exhausted with the exertion of speaking so long. I hung over his pillow to catch the slightest whisper, and ere he ceased I could scarcely distinguish the words. He said to me, gaspingly, "Kiss me — my child — forgive. Pray — for me." Then, placing my right hand in that of Sigismond, and my left in that of Coralie, he again murmured, "Pray!" I pressed my lips to his; Coralie did the same; then we knelt by his bedside. Eugene knelt at the foot of the couch, alone. I poured forth my whole sad soul in an audible prayer for this parting spirit — and for ourselves, stricken and subdued. Then there was a silence, deep and solemn, for many minutes. The "silver cord was loosed; the golden bowl was broken." Another human soul stood before its Judge.

Eugene was the first to speak. Rising, he came forward, and laying his hand upon my father's forehead — so painfully and deeply lined — he said, solemnly, "He is gone. *Dieu le veut ainsi!*" I looked up through blinding tears upon the face of the dead, and added, "*Dieu veuille avoir son âme!*"

Suddenly the room was filled with the sound of heavy sobbing. I looked around, and saw, crouching in an obscure corner, his dark face buried in his hands, the faithful old servitor, Thomas. It was a sad, sad sight — the

death of a man who had wronged and betrayed the trusting hearts of those who loved him best; we all felt it so, and wept silently.

"*M'amour!*" whispered Sigismond, "my duties commence now. You and Coralie must retire. Eugene and I, with the servants, will attend to everything. Come, my darling; you are completely worn down: I must insist upon taking you away."

I gave him my hand, and whispering, "Come, my sister," Coralie drew her arm about my waist, and they led me to my chamber.

"Be sure to rest, both of you — even if you cannot sleep," said Eugene, as we bade "good night." But it was no longer night; for as we passed out upon the gallery, the far orient was brightening into the clear rose-flush of early morning.

CHAPTER XX.

FINALE.

Like one who, doomed o'er distant seas
  His weary path to measure,
Who, home at last, with favoring breeze,
  Safe brings the far-sought treasure —

Like him, this heart, through many a track
  Of toil and sorrow straying,
Its loves, its hopes, brought safely back,
  Its toil and grief repaying.

SONG.

One gazed upon her till his very life
Was dedicate to that idolatry
With which young Love makes offering of itself.
The morning blush was lighted up by hope —
The hope of meeting her; the noontide hours
Were counted for her sake; upon the rose
He only saw the color of her cheek —
He watched the midnight stars until they wore
Her beauty's likeness. . . . . .
And days passed on. It was an eve in June.

LANDON.

I MUST turn over a broad leaf in this life-history of mine — the leaf of a year. After the death of my father, and the intense excitement of that eventful night recorded in the last chapter, the long tension of my strained energies gave way, and I sank into a protracted and dangerous illness. My wounds aggravated the disease — perchance were its originators; and the struggle between the full tide of buoyant life in my veins and the dread Angel of

Pain was prolonged, and for some time doubtful. Weeks passed away, and the dart of death hung poised, ready to strike, above my heart. For weeks I lay withering in fever's "house of unquenchable fire," prone at the feet of that

"Sleepless and deadly Dolores,
Our Lady of Pain."

When the first of July arrived, (the day appointed by my father for my wedding,) I lay wholly unconscious of time, or love, or joy — seeing not the sad, anxious eyes of Sigismond, which followed every glance of mine, in the vain hope of catching one ray of recognizing love — hearing not the stifled sobs of my sister Coralie, as she hung over me in that long agony of doubt and fear — noting not the tall figure in the sable robes of a Sister of Mercy, who, night after night, watched and waited by my side, anticipating every wish, and sorrowing over me as a mother might over her suffering child. At last — thanks to the free, vigorous training of my early years, which had given me what less than half our young ladies are possessed of (i. e. a "constitution") — the long and dubious battle was ended. Youth and life were victorious, and I began slowly to convalesce. Much — very much, however, was due to the judicious treatment and tender nursing of my "good genius," and my three self-appointed guardians, Coralie, Eugene, and the tall, beautiful woman, clad in serge, and wearing the cross and veil of the *Société de Sœurs.*

The summer months had passed ere I was able to leave my room; but just so soon as I was pronounced strong enough to bear the fatigue of travel, we set forth upon our journeyings — long contemplated, long delayed. It was decided, "in solemn conclave," that I was, as yet, too much of an invalid to dispense with the regular services of my

physician, and, consequently, Eugene Dupont (very greatly to his own satisfaction, I thought) accompanied us. I cannot say, however, that he confined his attentions entirely to the interesting "convalescent" during the easy and most delightful wanderings of those two pleasant autumn months; *au contraire*, a stranger might have supposed that it was *ma belle sœurette* who was the invalid, as the "devotions" of our young friend to her were both assiduous and unremitting. How happy we were — that is to say, Sigismond and I — to see Eugene's devotion to our lovely sister, and to note how, day by day, he was winning his way into that fresh young heart, stealing into the place once occupied by her *ci-devant* boy-lover, Monsieur Henri d'Herbelot. It was all exactly right; Eugene was in every way worthy of Coralie: he was our known and tried friend; he had been called upon by circumstances to take a position in our family in a strange crisis of our affairs; he possessed our confidence, and was worthy of it; and he had entered into close family relations with us precisely at the proper time to assume the throne and sceptre which young Monsieur d'Herbelot was so suddenly compelled to abdicate. True it is that Coralie had at first many misgivings as to her reception in our "select circles," many self-questionings as to whether she ought to accept the love of a noble man like Eugene Dupont, considering her birth and former associations. But the kind, easy, respectable world is usually generous toward a person combining in herself beauty, wealth, and position; consequently the "leaders of society" did not deem it the proper policy to inquire closely into her antecedents. It saw her young, beautiful, fascinating, cultivated, and *bien riche;* therefore the pleasant and polite "exclusives" asked no intrusive questions, but received her with open arms. As for Eugene, I think Coralie's antecedents never troubled his equanimity in the least;

and after a time he won her to his belief that it was neither sin nor shame to *her*, in that her beautiful young mother was deceived by a false ceremony — betrayed by that which wore the semblance of truth. The sin and the shame rested not on the deceived — she who had paid the penalty of another's cruel wrong with her life — but on the deceiver; and the betrayer was *my* father as well as Coralie's. Who, "then, made us to differ"?

One day during my convalescence, when my "good genius" and my sweet sister were both beside me, I had them bring together all those pictures which had so distracted me during that fierce fortnight in June. There was the diamond-circled boy-face which I had taken for Sigismond on the first of June, the lovely face of Coralie which hung in Moisinett's gallery, the broken medallion with that striking countenance so much resembling my own, and my father's portrait, now unveiled, hanging on the opposite wall. In examining them all together, comparing each with each, and turning them into different lights, I caught the *ignis fatuus* which had so harassed and eluded me heretofore. It was simply that varying, haunting, elfish sprite which you see at times and then lose completely — which a stranger sometimes recognizes at once, while you cannot discover it at all; that tantalizing "will-o'-the-wisp," called, in common parlance, "*the family favor.*"

It was during this time of luxurious rest, too, that I endeavored to clear up something of the mystery which surrounded my late *reine régnante*, Marguerite. Rare, reine Marguerite, I saw she was; but of her history I could discover nothing. Coralie had an intuitive belief that this queenly creature was a wronged and deserted woman; yet Marguerite never even so much as gave her name to any one. There was a small volume of Mrs. Norton's poems among my sister's books, in which Mar-

guerite had written this quotation — in itself "full of love and full of heart-break": "Of all the sad things in this world, I think the saddest is the leaf that tells what love was *meant to be* — and the turning of the leaf, to tell what love *has been.* All blossoms — then all ashes! Nothing is so beautiful as the temple love builds, nothing so miserable as the service of that temple." She was (as Coralie informed me) an accomplished musician. In the dusk of evening she would sweep the chords of her guitar, and, if alone, *always* sang with the sweetest, subtlest pathos, these simple words:

"The bright day is fled;
And the eve is flying
O'er the mountain's head;
And wingèd Faith is dead,
And Hope is dying.

"She who loved you so
Is a pale ruin;
And on her maiden brow
And in her eyes doth show
What comes of wooing!"

Love had been to her life's apples of Sodom. With all the eager *abandon* of her imperious, passionate nature, she had bitten that Dead Sea fruit to the core, and its bitterness and ashes had tainted all her after-life. I would lie there, with tear-dimmed eyes gazing upon her picture, and marvel *why* this should be? Why should she, a being formed wholly for light and love, be allowed in youth to sink into the dreary, deadly lovelessness of a life whose shades are full of horror, and whose clearest light is *nê des ténebrès?* Why should there now be nothing left in life for the warm, luxury-loving lips to feed upon, save those bitter, burning

"Dead fruits of the fugitive years;
Some stained as with wine, and made bloody,
And some as with tears?"

"Ah, God! that Fate, with flower-sweet finger-tips,
Should crush this fruit of death upon *such* lips!"

But it was even so. I conned it over as a child might bend his little brain to some incomprehensible lesson; I went over the letters line by line, but I never found the meaning. And yet I was taught by it sympathy and leniency to other souls — a sweet sympathy, and a sweeter charity. I learned from it that although we may fail to understand *why*, we all, in this life, eat together our apples of Sodom. The dark days come to us all; 'tis sorrow and suffering makes the world akin. Each one of us sits under the shadows. The "clouds return after the rain," the rainbow fades to a dim segment: it is nothing to us in our darkness that the sunshine is *somewhere;* it falls not then upon *our* dial. There will come a day, no doubt, when all these things will be plain to us; when we shall see "light in God's light clearly." But that will be when we have done with earth and its apples of Sodom. Meanwhile I say to myself, "Let me never forget that I am simply a woman among women, not a judge or an executioner. Let me ever remember this, and that

"If we knew the silent story
Quivering through the heart of pain,
Would our womanhood dare doom them
Back to haunts of vice and shame?
Life has many a tangled crossing,
Joy has many a break of woe;
And the cheeks, tear-washed, are whitest;
This the blessed angels know.

"Let us reach within our bosoms
For the key to human lives;
And, with love to erring nature,
Cherish good that still survives.

So that when our own freed spirits
Soar to realms of light again,
We may say, "*Our Father judge us*
As we judged our fellow-men."

In making up the brief finale of this little history, I must not forget to mention that one day during my convalescence, when we were talking over the strange days of that eventful June — and when I knew Monsieur Sauvollée to be quite too good-natured to reproach me — I told him of my inconstancy to him, and how wildly, for a brief period, I had wished to be a *real* Henri d'Herbelot, that I might marry Coralie! He laughed cordially, and said, in his own peculiar, grave-gay manner, "You are an odd woman, *fleur-de-lis.* But I cannot say I love you less for being a trifle exceptional. I will not dispute your good taste in wishing to make a wife of *belle Coralie* during my absence; but of one thing I must assure you: had *you* been absent, I should never once have dreamed of *making a wife of Eugene!*" I am not sure but he had the laugh against me, after all.

No romance-reader can avoid the conviction that, had I been a "heroine," I would now, of necessity, have given myself up to the tortures of despondency, and through long years have committed Sigismond and myself to a purgatorial state of existence, avowing that some dreadful and altogether insuperable barrier to our union lay between us. In the third volume of our mutual "heroics," it would be accidentally discovered that this insurmountable barrier was purely an imaginary one, that I deemed he *must* cease to love me on account of my father's errors, that he *must* consider my name as resting under a stigma; therefore "*heroine-ically*" I had freed him from his engagement, bade him spasmodically to "Go — and forget," resigning myself thenceforth to melancholy misery in the most ap-

proved and orthodox style imaginable. I am sorry enough to be obliged to disappoint you in this, the exalted and romantic course which doubtless *ought* to have been pursued under the circumstances. I regret to be compelled to disenchant you by confessing that I was no "heroine," but merely a rather matter-of-fact, practical young woman, who was not at all capable of such heroic deeds. I loved my noble-hearted lover well enough to *trust* him, and not one doubt of his continued affection and respect for me ever crossed my mind. I could not have *wronged him* by such a doubt. And thus it came to pass that all things went on as usual, smoothly, safely, and steadily, between us; we loved each other tenderly, dearly, devotedly, and we were sufficiently commonplace to endeavor to continue our prospect of peace and love, and to greatly rejoice therein day by day. Of course, however, I lost — actually threw away indeed — my only opportunity of ever becoming a "heroine," and making myself and those I loved best, respectably and romantically miserable! I deplore the necessity which compels me to this confession; but "Truth is mighty, and must prevail!"

. . . . . .

It was again the evening of the first of June; this the June of 1853. Lights blazed throughout the old mansion-house — the home of my father; but he lay sleeping in a narrow house, cold, silent, and dark. The great agony which the "first of June" was wont to bring could come to him no more. Peace — peace to the perturbed spirit! Rest — rest to the troubled soul!

On this balmy summer evening, when the lights shone softly through the lofty rooms, when the rich perfumes of flowers and richer strains of music rose from the hall below, when through the spacious drawing-room there surged a stream of silken robes, and the glitter of diamonds

flashed up like foam upon the wave, when without there was a rushing to and fro of wheels, and within the soft murmur of modulated voices and cheery laughter, *ma belle sœur* and myself stood side by side, in our own pleasant chamber, with bridal-veils falling to the floor, and coronals of the scented orange-bloom about our brows. The snowy silken robes were all adjusted, the flowers all properly disposed, the finishing touches given by deft-handed maids — there was nothing more to do; we stood there hand-in-hand and looked into each other's eyes. Happy, lustrous, love-lit eyes were they!

"Could the ladies admit a visitor for a few moments?" we heard a voice inquiring of Ninette, who had just opened the door.

"Can you see a lady, mademoiselle?" asked Ninon, as she threw open the door and disclosed to our view a tall and stately figure, clad in robes of sable serge, and wearing the veil and mantle of a sister of the Order of Mercy.

"You are welcome; walk, in, madam," I said, as I left the side of Coralie and advanced toward the stranger. She met me in the middle of the room, lifted the thick veil, and disclosed the darkly-splendid eyes and beautiful face of Marguerite. Coralie sank upon her bosom; "The Roses" had met once more! But what a contrast! The white and shining robes of the one, with her bridal crown and draperies of richest lace, lay mingling with the coarse black mantle and heavy sable veil of the other; the face of one so radiantly fair and beaming, the countenance of the other so dark, so pale, and yet so imperial in its beauty still! And how unlike these same "Roses" when I first met them — the one in her bright rose-bloom, the other in her grave, half-mourning robes of gray! Verily a change had passed upon the life-dream of each, and each was higher, holier, happier on *this* day than on *that*.

Perhaps Marguerite divined my thought at the moment; for, closing her arms round my bride-sister, she said, turning toward me, "Yes, we are happier now — both of us: let us hope it is because we are better. And to whom do we owe this blessed change? To *you*, mademoiselle; under Heaven, *to you alone!* A woman, you have redeemed your sister-woman. It is only woman who can do this: therefore would to God there were more women in the world who could dare follow your example! How many — ah! how many, even such as I, might be saved! might be a crown of glory to your brows in God's great hereafter! Tell them what you have done: ask them to come over and help us. We need their help, and God's help; ask them if they will send the one and pray for the other. I have heard that you are both to be married to-night — that you leave this city to-morrow: it is well. The pestilence has already made its appearance; our hospitals are full of the fever-stricken. I rejoice that you, and those you love, will be far away."

"*Mais vous, ma chère Marguerite;* you will not remain?" uttered Coralie, raising her bright head from its sombre resting-place.

"Yes, my sweet one; the humble Sister of Mercy remains here. It is our province to watch beside the sick, to minister to the plague-stricken, to comfort the dying. The pestilence has no terrors for me: even if it had, my path of duty lies directly through it, and therein must my footsteps be found. There is One who has said, 'Behold, I come quickly!' May He make that promise good to me."

Tears filled our eyes — the change in her was so great. It was a happy change, too; and yet we wept. She noticed it; her own eyes grew lustrous with shining drops, and taking a hand of each, she said, in a tremulous voice,

"You weep — and *for me!* I thank you for it; but happy brides must not weep. I heard that you were going to-morrow, and could not resist the temptation to come and give you my poor blessing, and fold Coralie to my bosom once more in life. Madame Lesueur, who will shortly leave this place for a secluded country home, determined to lead a new life henceforth, desired me to say to you that if her humble and constant prayers for the happiness of both can avail aught, then you will be blessed indeed. And now my time is up. They are waiting for you: I must say farewell. Hasten your departure from this plague-stricken city, and do not return until late: when the snows come — the frost, which is a talisman to stay the pestilence — then you, pure and beautiful as they, may come also. When you return, come to the old Cemetery, and ask for Marguerite. The marble will answer, and tell you where she lies! For the last time, adieu! *Dieu vous garde toujours;* and forget not Marguerite!" She wrung our hands, kissed the brow of each, and was gone — like a shadow of the night.

What yet remains unsaid? But little. When we returned from a long bridal tour through Europe and the Orient, the fearful pestilence which swept our Southern seaboard in 1853 had passed away; the sunny skies of Cuba now (1860) bend like a benison over our happy homes; Coralie's children and mine frolic together under the orange-trees; and we are happy — very happy in our lives of loveliness and love. Seven years have passed over us like a pleasant dream, and Time has touched us lightly. Last winter, when we visited the Crescent City, we strolled, one serene Sabbath evening, hand in hand, through the old Catholic Cemetery. Both Coralie Dupont and her

henceforth lifelong lover, "Henri," (she calls me "Henri" still,) had seen it before; but never, since we placed it there, had the sunlight seemed to linger so lovingly over the fair white monument and the words:

MARGUERITE,
SISTER OF THE ORDER OF MERCY.
September 25th, 1853.
FORTITER, FIDELITER,
FELICITER.

THE END.

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